

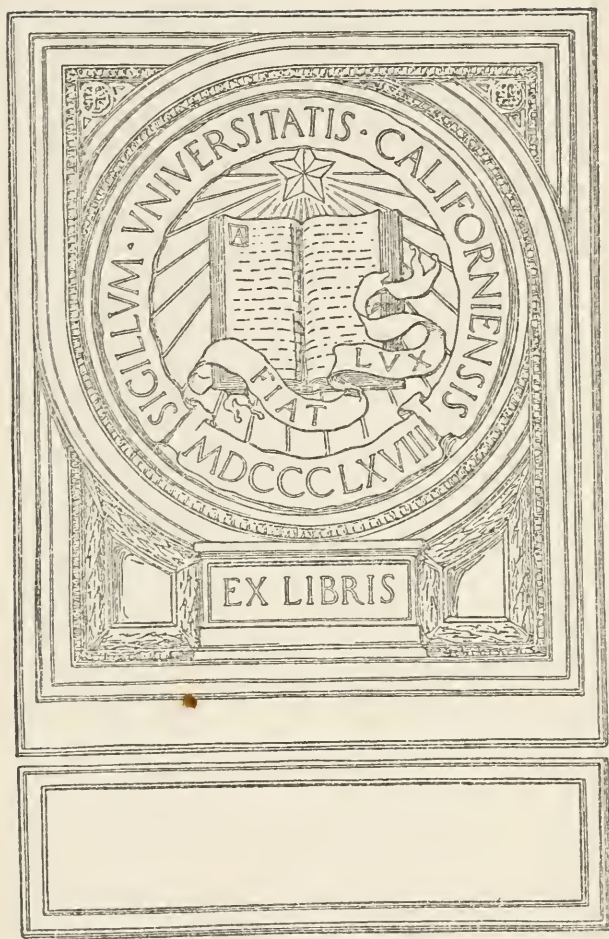
ERNEST DOWSON

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VICTOR PLARR



ERNEST DOWSON



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ERNEST DOWSON

1888-1897

REMINISCENCES, UNPUBLISHED LETTERS
AND MARGINALIA

BY

VICTOR PLARR

WITH A BIBLIOGRAPHY COMPILED BY
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“Already several of the so-called minor poets of the time have won something like the indisputableness of classics. Every survey of recent poetry takes willing and serious account of Francis Thompson, Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson and John Davidson ; and for greater reasons than that these poets are no longer living.”

From “The Eighteen Nineties,” by Holbrook Jackson, page 191 (Grant Richards Ltd., 1913).

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A WORD OF EXPLANATION

POOR Ernest Dowson through his sufferings is becoming almost as famous as that earlier unhappy poet who by self-destruction set apart his life-story in the sorrowful annals of literature. There were perhaps two Chattertons—who, at this long distance of time, can tell? There were certainly two Dowsons—one the vexed and torn spirit of the biographers, of Mr Sherard and Mr Arthur Symonds, the other a Dowson *intime*, known, I venture to think, to very few, but by those few greatly loved.

This intimate and perhaps essential Dowson appears, I am convinced, in these thirty or so letters, now for the first time published in full or in part. In them no ugly slur of passion, no ill savours, are to be found. Instead we are refreshed by fragrance—transient and slight, perhaps, yet evident—by fragrance, be it said again, and by an unfailing touch of good breeding, a gracious and insistent air of modesty—by something diffident, boyishly shy, often beautiful and noble. To me the re-reading of these letters of his brings back my friend as I knew him and love to

remember him—the gentleman, the kindly, charming boyish friend, the scholar, the exquisite poet. I read and re-read through gathering tears, and lay them down when I can see no more.

Frater, ave, atque vale !

ERNEST DOWSON

REMINISCENCES

It was early in the year 1888 that my old friend, Mr Charles Sayle, that great introducer, first said to me: "There's a man whom you ought to know, a young poet just down from college, a man exactly like J."—naming a well-known writer; "only, if possible, more so!"

Cæsar and Pompey were very much alike, in the opinion of the black man, especially Pompey. And this was the case with Mr J. and Ernest Dowson, the latter being the more alike—that is, the more representative of the type. So possessed was I with this parallelism that, like an eminent bungling barrister in a law case full of names, who addresses the defendant by the patronymic of his dupe, I constantly transposed their surnames, and for years confused and puzzled Ernest Dowson by addressing him as J. I made somewhat the same mistake again only yesterday.

We met in Mr Sayle's rooms, those quaint picturesque rooms which were to be found in Gray's Inn years ago, and have doubtless not been obliterated in that ancient place.

We were friends at once. The child that was in both of us was our bond. A man may not boast or be too egotistic: do not, therefore, accuse me, courteous reader, of writing too much of myself or of indulging in self-glorification when I say that I rejoice for evermore at the thought that the otherwise deterrent childish factor within me has at different times opened to me the gateways of the spirit.

We launched at once upon some tack of conversation about our disabilities. Peter Pan had not been heard of, but we adumbrated him.

“ Shall you ever feel old ? ”

“ No ; I am static—about four years of age.”

“ Like Victor Hugo at the age of eighty ! ”

“ It’s a great drawback in applying for appointments. One must study the stodgy ! ”

“ Yes ; fancy a creature of four among old dry gentlemen with long black legs, applying for a secretaryship to a gas-works.”

“ It’s a nightmare. I often have them. I find myself put into parlous positions, and trying in my dream to say—‘ The cumulative ratiocinations of this objective evidence are calculated to divert the attention of the party of immutability in inverse proportion to the corroborative dogmatism of the prior deponent. The issue, indeed, could not be more luminously stated.’ I’m only four years old, and it’s rather a strain.”

“ Yes, yes ! When I transact serious business—and I do all day—I view myself from the outside

as something strange and awful. They refer to me in reports without a blush as 'our plodding friend, Mr ——.' Ye gods, I haven't the pleasure of the gentleman's acquaintance. Were it possible to talk as you do in nightmares one would be very eminent in a year's time. One would be a big barrister or in Parliament."

"No, one would write for *The Times* and have a masterly grasp—of bimetallism, say. D'you know that at the age of seventeen, in the Sixth Form of a Public School, I put important leading articles aside as I should put Sanscrit or classical German aside? Couldn't understand a sentence!"

"Numbers of people, I fancy, regard poetry in the same light all their lives."

We cited old forgotten authors, to whom one dares not now refer without a blush, or to whom one adverts desperately by way of paradox, the kind of paradox in which the elderly are indulged because they are known to have suffered some disappointments.

Shall I say that, at that early date in our acquaintance, Loti was one of these forgotten? Dowson first spoke of Loti, and I have a dim inkling of a recollection that he spoke also of Plato, in at least one of whose immortal dialogues he rejoiced and had probably been "ploughed" during his mysterious sojourn at Queen's College, Oxford.

We saw much of one another from this time forward. He was singularly fresh, young, eager,

sympathetic, his charming face unscathed by any serious sorrows or dissipations.

There followed, in his career, a strange period of rowdiness—I can use no other word—of the undergraduate type—that is to say, it was quaint and boyish.

I occupied the most uncomfortable rooms in the world in Great Russell Street, and often, late at night, Dowson crept into the house and begged a bed. I was so selfish as to suggest a sofa, and on a horrible horsehair sofa, or on the floor, in a blatant parlour, he often slept, under such blankets as could be found. He seems to have kept this custom up, for Mr Edgar Jepson, in an admirable account of him, published in *The Academy* in 1906, says that Ernest Dowson often slept in his arm-chair. It was an unwise custom at best, but we did not suspect the frailty of his health.

Ordinarily a Rechabite in those days, I had nothing to offer him but water at an hour after midnight. He drank his tumbler of water, and remarked [good-humouredly :] “ This reminds me of Milton,” who always drank a glass of water after supper.

A legend has arisen of an inebriate Ernest Dowson. It has been generated chiefly in the two closely allied consciences of Amercia and of British Nonconformity. Personally, in eight years or so, I remember only a trifling aberration from the path of temperance, when he leant, smiling meditatively, against a lamp-post, exactly where the

Irving statue now stands. He manifestly required support.

A lady, who had been [mercifully] blind to his condition, was being shown into a cab, and I shall never forget—I see the scene now vividly—how he leapt from his dream—he had been standing storklike, one leg crossed over the other—and presented the lady, or the cabby, with her fare. It was done in a flash of lightning, with a dreamy delicacy quite incomparable. She is dead of consumption, poor thing, so this trifling reminiscence hurts no one! He took out a florin and I wondered at the time that he had so much money in his pocket. [Everybody is, in these pallid days, called “drunk” if he is ever so little elated, but when I was a small boy, in St Andrews in Fifeshire, only those were called drunk who lay in the gutter on their backs. Surely some middle way of speech might be discovered between these two extremes.]

[Sometimes, with other merry revellers, he arrived in the street outside my rooms, and bawled my name, in chorus with his friends, for many minutes.] The long and dreary street must have become aware of my existence, and, in my most uncomfortable bed, I reflected at the time that never yet had an ancient patronymic figured in such wise!

These friends—let the Muse of History descend and unbend—called themselves “Bingers,” and to “binge” was to behave and to potate most

eccentrically. The Benson Company are said still to understand the word.

Those were scapegrace days—and some amusing traditions could be related concerning them—but, Lord! as Mr Pepys would have said, they were nothing more. At all times they were far, very far, from the depth of lurid dissipation that is being allowed to cover the poet's good fame, unless it be rescued betimes.

And Mr Jepson's kindly apology for his glass of absinthe before dinner was not really necessary in 1906, seeing that Dowson was an amateur of many good plebeian French customs, among which the *appéritif*—often consisting of absinthe—is one. Englishmen dislike this poison, which they liken to paregoric, a mysterious mixture not known to Continentals, or to Ernest Dowson.

His short career, indeed, may be said to divide itself into three periods, of which the second alone really concerns us, for it is the finest. In the first period, which lasted from 1888, or a little earlier, to 1891 or thereabouts, the poet was after all only in his green salad days, just as any other normal youth might be. Nor would it be necessary to allude to them save for the emergence of a miracle—the miracle of poetry. For all the while that Ernest Dowson ran foolishly and noisily about London, sleeping on sofas, consorting with the last of the Bob Sawyers, and proving on the whole agreeably unwise, his muse was fluttering into life.

Suddenly, we were all, as it were, startled by a

perfect poem from his pen. We had not, so to speak, expected it of the pleasant youth, who played billiards punctually at six o'clock every evening and smoked rather vile Vevey cigars !

The poets have often presented this paradox. Thus the young Shakespeare meditated " Venus and Adonis " among the deer-stealers, and Byron, the dandy, wooed the muse in the intervals of the deals at Almack's. It is a truism to say that poetry will out even in the most adverse circumstances, and perhaps because of them. How many of our bards, for instance, have been tempered after passing through the purifying fires of an English public school, where to be a poet is to rank vilely with pale young martyrs who say their prayers, " swots " who conscientiously do their lessons, Radicals, fat-eaters, and other pariahs hateful to the soul of Boy !

Dowson had escaped the public school Hinnom-fires, and at Oxford, where poetry is an honoured tradition, he can surely not have suffered, but his early associations in London were in piquant contrast to his genius. Most of his friends cannot have dreamt that he was a poet at all.

Perhaps this is as it should be. What chance, after all, had young M. de Lamartine, whose adoring family helped him to shut himself up in his bedroom and to fast while composing poetry in his teens ? I am French enough by race, and old-fashioned enough, to adore the orthodox romantics, but often, in reading them, I wonder whether they

would have survived the kicks, and almost the obloquy, which must, at some time or other, and in varying degrees, have been the portion of the schoolboy Shelleys, Cloughs, Matthew Arnolds, and Lionel Johnsons.

And here is yet another paradox. Whence have we the gift of poetry in any generation? From whom in the past does this divine essence distil? What accounts for that Latin Ernest Dowson, that belated counterpart of Catullus, Propertius and the rest.

Many of us knew Ernest Dowson's father, a remarkable man, a wit, the friend of half the interesting artists and men of letters of his generation, the relative of Browning's¹ "Waring," one holding the full and true tradition of Elizabeth Barrett Browning through the Barretts, and, through his friendship with Severn, of John Keats. But this elder Mr Dowson did not account for a Catullus, nor did Ernest Dowson's mother, accomplished and intellectual as that lady was.

It is true that the poet was wont to shake his head gloomily over a print or pencil sketch of an ancestor engaged in theatricals, on a queer stage with spindling Corinthian columns, in the period of George IV.! But at most that ancestor can only have accounted for the Vevey cigars and the *vie de Bohème*. Whence—from what older stock—came "Amor Umbratilis," and "Supreme Unction," and that glorious poem which bursts forth in one of these letters?

¹ One of Robert Browning's early letters is addressed to a Dowson.

"Amor Umbratilis," was one of the first poems that attracted much attention. It was published, if I remember rightly, by Mr Herbert Horne in *The Century Guild Hobby Horse* together with a batch of the poet's other most noteworthy verses. The MS. of it, in pencil, lies before me now, inscribed on the back of a fierce letter referring to the poet's Oxford bills, which, he told me, he had agreed to pay by degrees. "You have not returned this promissory note as arranged—please do so at once." And Ernest Dowson has immortalised this gruffness with one of the loveliest elegies in the language! One wonders if he chose his scrap of paper of set purpose. The solicitor's date on it is October 7, 1890. He sent me, and I believe others of his friends, numbers of MS. poems. I have thirteen of his best—all, in fact, except the now famous "Cynara." One is written on the back of a letter from a stockbroker: "I have advised you a good many times to join the 'S—— Syndicate,' and you might have got the shares at one pound each, but you have let the chance slip through your fingers and the price is now three pounds."

To think what a chance our poet missed! The letters are reproofing and rather uncivil, but a law of libel, designed in a democratic age to protect queer fish from being caught, prevents me from printing the writers' names. Perhaps, however, I ought to do so in the interests of historic truth and to advertise their respective firms.

The poet told me that he adored gambling, but I have no evidence that he gambled. [He loved excitement, as all true artists do,] and gambling is one of the attainable excitements. "*Il faut être toujours un peu ivre,*" he was fond of quoting from Baudelaire, and he frequently complained that a long bout of early to bed and early to rise, combined with reasonable diet, etc., knocked him up, as Lord Byron would have said, damnably.

I am hastening to the poet's second period, the worthiest one, but the first detains me at every turn. We smiled at him then. He was a dear, queer fellow! He said to me once that he rather disliked "humour," and yet he was half consciously humorous always. His education before the Oxford period, itself a "veiled period," to quote Borrow's phrase, was wrapped in mystery. His childhood, he tells us, in a marginal note—I shall refer to these later—was pagan. "All these fluctuations and agonies of a hypersensitive, morbid childhood with Hebraic traditions are to [me] incomprehensible," he writes. "My childhood was pagan." As to natural religion, which belongs to childhood, it was "a phase, which at no time of my life have I ever undergone or understood."

A truly charming pastel of his little wistful ideal face at the age of four, by the late W. G. Wills, hung over the mantelpiece of his family's drawing-room in their house at Forest Row in 1888-1890. The young expression was unforgettable, and this

is perhaps the only portrait of Ernest Dowson that remains, or has been extant, besides Mr William Rothenstein's sketch and the reproduction of a photograph of him in a Queen's College "blazer," prefixed to his "Collected Poems." At the time of writing this Dr Greene tells me that he once asked Ernest Dowson to lunch to meet the famous Mr Sargent, but the painter was apparently X unimpressed by his possible sitter.

He received no regular education, unless we count his one half-mythic year at college. He had learnt Latin from an Italian priest in a mountain village in Italy—possibly Senta, a place beloved by him. At least this is the tradition as it came to me from him. In many ways he was surprisingly and refreshingly ignorant. Quite gravely once he averred to me that he supposed the Red Indians in the United States greatly outnumbered the white men, and that he hoped the natives in their war-paint would soon march on New York, destroy it, and thus break the back of transatlantic civilisation! Yet he was the friend of some charming Americans, and perhaps his truest admirers are in the States.

Of modern science, like most of his literary X generation, he knew nothing at all, nor of history, and he commented wonderingly upon another's habit of always reading it. He envied a poet whose objective vignettes of periods and peoples struck him as a tapestry. "It is always that power of weaving tapestries that I envy and admire!"

I am setting down my recollections of him at random, and before I forget them, and there is no need to be systematic in a labour of love. In English politics he was vague. The still mighty voice of Gladstone appealed to him not at all. He disregarded the Irish Question—all questions of the day. Philanthropy and socialism bored him. Like Lionel Johnson he was interested in the White Rose League, and told me that he had been solemnly presented to the authentic descendant and last representative of the Stuarts—not, by the bye, the Duke of Buccleugh, but a solemn lady with her grey hair down her back, who stood, pathetically enough, in the upper chamber of a small restaurant in Soho, where the restaurateur and his wife acted as her chamberlains. The lady strongly resembled Charles I., he averred. From the French point of view he became a Boulangist—some well-known actress had just done so, who knew about as much of politics as her pet lemur—not because he knew anything of French affairs or history either, but because he wished to be “agin the government.” [To him Paris was a city full of decadents, topped by Verlaine. Quite the feeblest things he has written, in my humble opinion, are his imitations of that errant genius. Indeed, Verlaine, and a certain parasite on the genius of others, who is dead, and shall be nameless, were, in great measure, his perverters. One had, in the late eighties and early nineties, to be preposterously French, and to spectators of this psycho-

logical aberration, especially to genuine French spectators, whose earliest recollections were a darkling sky streaked with the bomb-trails of a Night of Terror in 1870, the sight of young Englishmen discovering an unworthy side of France would have been disgusting had it not been mainly comic.]

Stray Gauls used to be imported to grace literary circles here. I remember one such—a rare instance of a rough Frenchman—to whom Dowson was devoted. When a Gaul appeared in a coterie we were either silent, like the schoolgirls in their French conversation hour, or we talked a weird un-French French like the ladies in some of Du Maurier's drawings.

“Ey-ce-quer voo connoissay leys peyntoors de Burne-Jones, Mossoo Dubwaw?”

(Poor Oscar Wilde) I particularly noted, distinguished himself in the rich old fearless French of Stratford-atte-Bowe. Hence I venture to disagree with the great Monsieur André Gide, who said “he had scarcely any accent, at least only what it pleased him to affect when it might give a somewhat new or strange appearance to a word—for instance, he used purposely to pronounce *scepticisme* as *skepticisme*.” This he did, I will swear, because he was a Greek scholar, a collaborator with Professor Mahaffy, and for no other reason.

But let not any Frenchman who may chance to read this passage begin to crow over us! With

the solitary exception of my father's old friend, Adolphe Wurtz, the great chemist, who was an Alsatian, no Frenchman whom I have met has ever spoken English otherwise than as a Frenchman, prettily enough, it is true. M. Wurtz spoke English perfectly. Born bilinguals are few and far between. The one I know best speaks neither language with absolute correctness.

Dowson's own French was dim, but his admiration of France shone out, and puts him among the virtual pioneers of the *Entente Cordiale*.

He was singularly well read in French literature, a curious and indefatigable student of that wide source of culture. With Balzac he was entirely conversant, and he perused Stendhal diligently and with often repeated admiration. Few have followed Dowson so far. He rejoiced in Chamfort, but his ideas on the French revolutionary epoch were confined to this—that the aristocrats died like great gentlemen, and the opinion was fortified for him, in my presence, by a famous æsthetic friend, who told him that they always went to their deaths wearing white satin clothes and with red roses in their coat lapels ! There was evidently some confusion here with what is recorded of Lord Ferrers, in his wedding-dress, or Montrose in his "fine scarlet." Of his love of Loti's work I have spoken, and he introduced me, at an early date, to the prose poems of Baudelaire, which he has imitated, rather tragically, in "Decorations." "Les Yeux des Pauvres," which describes the

wondering, half-mystical look in the eyes of poor people gazing into the window of a restaurant, arrested his attention to the last degree.

In England's literary history and literature he was widely read, too, and of the Americans he most admired Hawthorne and Henry James and, I think, Bret Harte.

To be such a shining stylist as he proved himself he certainly must have ranged through the finest masterpieces. There can be no doubt of that. His gift of style allures, perhaps, the most in his cameo-like verse. [In the prose, on which he set extreme value, there is sometimes an apparent touch of labour and preciousness.] There are petulant Gallicisms, for instance, set down with deliberation. He was fond of quoting Flaubert—was it Flaubert?—who sat long in meditation in front of a blackboard with alternative words chalked thereon. Dowson would have had me believe that he, too, pondered the *mot juste* for hours. It was impossible to point out to him that English has two and a half vocabularies and French only one, for he disliked anything in the nature of common knowledge, and had all the modern horror of being thought well-informed or of acquiring information. Yet he rarely insulted one's time-honoured susceptibilities by talking of this or that being bourgeois, and, though, like many of his type, he tried not to believe what was unpalatable to him, he was too good-natured not to be really catholic in taste.

The blackboard, which in England we then snobbishly associated with primary education to such an extent that we laboriously did without it in the universities, and the *not juste*, which is an exotic too, were part of a general system of things French, of which at times he was an almost excited apostle. Thus he constantly insisted that the *rime riche* is a beauty in poetry. A brutal Philistine pointing out to him that the *rime riche* is a bore in French and an imbecility in English versification, he so far acquiesced as seldom to use it. In common with Lionel Johnson he found an occult virtue in the Alexandrine, but again did not press his admiration to the point of using it overmuch. That he employed it with grand effect on occasion—when a long line is necessary—I do not deny.

His charm was such that one agreed tacitly to disagree about a host of subjects. And then, too, there was always the saving common ground, between several of us, of love of beauty and of a fine style and serious art. He felt many things deeply, and it is a truism to say that he achieved supremely good work. As a thoughtful critic he was not as those who frighten scholarly lovers of the pageantry of Time into silence by their sneers at all that happened more than a week ago, yet give you nothing—nothing—to take its place. Nor, feeling deeply as he did, was he of those who at bottom have no feeling, though babbling perpetually of culture—those “who swallow their

opinions in platoons," and when you ask them what they think of this or that, or so-and-so, seem to listen and perpend as though waiting for a guiding spirit voice from the head of their coterie, their suburb, or their favourite review.

I confess, though, that in defending the obvious one was not so bold with him as with Lionel Johnson, a dear friend of both of us. Johnson was a very full man, Ernest Dowson a good-humoured eclectic, with his patches of cultivation and deserts between.

The passion for things French, for the South, may perhaps have come to Dowson from his early wanderings out of England. There was a certain originality in this passion, which belies mere affectation. And the charm and the genius of the man depend greatly on this originality, which was for years increasingly at death-grips with squadrons of affectations. Sometimes these bore him down.

They began, perhaps, by his profession of a grand passion for Wagner's operas, but a Philistine friend of his was so wicked as to surmise that he valued the music because he was taken to hear it by a fashionable man-about-town. He dressed to go to these concerts, yet of evening dress he had a quite old-fashioned Bohemian horror.

As his reputation increased he was taken up by numbers of brilliant quidnuncs, and some of his faithful friends suffered pangs of jealousy, like poor little Frederika, deserted by Goethe, when he could not sup with them because he was going to sup, less comfortably perhaps, with young Mr and

Mrs So-and-So, people who had only just heard of him. Of course he excused himself by expressing intense admiration for young Mr So-and-So's little book! [A telegram came one day from the Oscar Wilde entourage, peremptorily ordering him to appear at the Café Royal to lunch with the then great man. His excitement was marked: he was flattered and fluttered, though a Philistine friend suggested that a reply should be sent urging the great paradox-monger to go to a warm place or to take lessons in ordinary social formalities.]

→ Young Mr Ezra Pound, to whom Dowson is a kind of classical myth, just as the ancients are a myth to us all, tells me a story, told him in turn by a good recorder, of how Dowson went to see poor Wilde in Dieppe after the *débâcle*, and how he endeavoured to reform his morality by diverting it at least into a natural channel. It is at best a smoking-room anecdote, not fit for exact repetition. I suppose they drank absinthe together in a big tawdry noisy café near that queer odoriferous fish-market, where they sell all the monsters of the sea which English fishermen reject.

Here, for Dowson's sake, entire frankness is necessary. During the eight or nine years of our friendship, he told me often—perhaps repeatedly—that he simply could not understand the “invert” point of view. It did not appeal to him in the least. Honesty bids me put this definitively on record in these late mythopœic days. And therewith I desire to drop the subject.]

But his wish to go and visit (poor Wilde) was on a par with much else in his last phase. When he went to Dieppe, he was evidently following the trend of his mind. He had fallen on evil days—felt, probably, the approach of the end—was overshadowed (poor dear fellow,) by domestic tragedy, personal chagrin and disillusionment, financial worry and the rest. Moreover, through the irony of Fate, he was himself becoming a fashionable writer, his pen much sought after by the shrewd and the parasitic. He had to do something that would keep him “in the movement,” that delusion^x of most of us. At the same time he may have felt that a man whose heart the Fates had broken may well show sympathy with another who has deliberately broken his own heart. So he went to Dieppe, probably with a mixture of motives, to pay his call, to figure with his broken heart.

As poets should, he certainly loved flattery, and was prodigal of it to those he loved, but there was a time—and this came in the midst of all his troubles—when it threatened his equilibrium as an artist.

I may seem to have written these last few pages with some appearance of *morgue*, but I really write in sorrow rather than in any spirit of bitterness—in affectionate sorrow and with infinite regret.

Ernest Dowson is numbered by Mr Holbrook Jackson, in his admirable if somewhat mythopoetical record of the “Eighteen Nineties,”

among the interesting band, including Wilde, Beardsley, and Johnson, who joined the Church of Rome in what we [now] consider the period of "the Decadence."

Lionel Johnson, at least, could give chapter and verse for his conversion. Hardly so Dowson. I shall never forget the day of his admittance to the Church. He came to me rather excitedly, and yet shook hands with weak indecision. His hesitating hand-shake, alas! always betrayed a sorrowful fatigue.

"I have been admitted," he said, but he seemed disappointed, for the heavens had not fallen, nor had a sign been vouchsafed. The priest who had admitted him had done so quite casually and had seemed bored. Afterwards, it seemed to me, he forgot all about his religion with surprising alacrity. [Only his poetry bears witness to his romantic admiration of a creed, which, after all, he shares with many Protestants and Agnostics.]

[Respecting sincere Catholics ¹ as I do, I was keenly annoyed with his conversion—with this kind of conversion. It was comparable to the way in which our clever young men to-day, with no knowledge of biology, folk-lore or the rationale of English constitutional history, become socialists. But I held my tongue. Our literary life is a long reticence at best.]

¹ I trust the poet's Catholic friends, who are also my friends, will forgive me for stating the case as it struck me.

DOWSON THE DOCKER

A TEDIOUS commonplace of conversation, derived from journalism, is to the effect that letter-writing is a vanished art. People have no leisure : they live in a rush. Yet it would, perhaps, be more true to say that the average Englishman, even in the days of the Grays and the Horace Walpoles, was never a letter-writer. His native pride, his innate reticence, restrain him. How many of us are acquainted with clever people whose curt missives are as deadly dull, as little illustrative of the truth that is in them, as the inscriptions on Scottish tombstones, or on poor Ernest Dowson's tombstone, which I think I saw one day when attending the funeral of that literary and scientific giant, the late Sir John Simon ?

Ernest Dowson enjoyed much leisure. And, at all times, he abhorred rush, a phrase which is ordinarily our excuse for not bearing in mind the close ties of clan, family and friendship. He loved to write a letter, probably as a relief to the excitement of literary composition. It may be he wrote thousands of letters in his time, all so exquisitely phrased as to suggest affectation. His last letter to me, with a touch of heart-break in it, is better written than any of the rest.

His was a beautiful handwriting, the clear script of a poet with a sense of form, who has learnt to write Greek, has learnt free-hand drawing, has engaged in clerkly avocations, and sets a proper value on what he writes. Shelley, with his exquisite script, was one such. Also Alexander Pope. Pope's fascinating simple notes to those he loved lie before me in MS. as I write this perhaps rather conventional essay on handwriting. Poor crooked Pope, poor unhappy Ernest Dowson !

Once, in his delightful old dock-house (*pace* all the critics and official biographers), I surprised him inditing exquisitely, and in a sort of court-hand, a huge bill addressed to some shipowner. The document was a large quarto sheet, and there were fascinating items to this effect :

To caulking	.	.	.	£50	0	0
To scraping off barnacles	.	.	.	£25	0	0
To re-painting	.	.	.	£48	10	0
To mending pumps, captain's dog's kennel, and supplying buckets	.	.	.	£23	17	3½

The total was a fat, formidable, comfortable amount. It totalled, I remember, something not far short of £158.

To my merely bourgeois mind this appeared a desirable sum, and as I looked over the shoulder of my poetical friend I could not help marvelling that he wrote this sort of thing as one to the manner born.

“What a delight it is to be a docker,” I said, very humbly, “and who would have thought of you as inditing these fat lucrative bills?”

He wriggled his shoulders, and smiled his inscrutable smile, the smile of a man who ponders. He certainly made out the account as though he loved it and knew his work thoroughly.

Despite this evidence of an amiable interest in shipowners, Ernest Dowson and his father explained that they did not like them, as these had now formed a habit, mainly accounted for by the then imminent decadence of the Port of London, of “lying off” in mid-Thames instead of “coming into dock” in the time-honoured manner. And this relieved my apprehensions, for, in those days, if I may wax biographical on my own account, I had been unlucky enough to become entangled in ultra-democratic journalism and to have attained a vivid insight into the ethics of labour leaders and trade unions, which will last me for the remainder of my pilgrimage in this vale of tears. Our venture in fools’ journalism—the later developments of which were forced upon us—cost my father and myself a large slice of our small capital—it is often the fate of the honest gentleman to pay for the quarrels of labour with the more or less imaginary vampires of Mammon—but, for the moment, I was supposed to be fighting against shipowners, who, in those days, not so long after Plimsoll’s time, by the by, were probably often not all that they should be. Hence, I was afraid

that I might appear a Larkinian of that day to the Dowsons, father and son. They, however, reassured me.

By persons of less than bourgeois descent, by persons who are ashamed of their origin, we hear much abuse of the *bourgeoisie*. Mr Bernard Shaw brings the idea over from the France of 1848. The *ouvriers* of 1830, 1848 and 1871 were writhing under the heel of fat and vulgar *épiciers*, very vile and grasping people, such as sit at the receipt of custom in Continental hotels to-day.

But the Dowsons, father and son, perfectly well-bred, exquisitely polished, genteel in the good old sense of a word which it has been in the interest of many to suppress, were of the type of Victor Hugo's old gentleman, the grandfather of Marius in "Les Misérables," "*qui portait sa bourgeoisie comme un marquisat*." The type still abounds in provincial France to-day.

Ernest Dowson appreciated the ancestral trade half humorously. Mr Arthur Symonds need not have pitied him for being a docker in those early artless days.

We went out and looked at a jolly ship in the little dry dock, which was two hundred and eighty-seven feet long by eighty wide ; the depth of water " on a two foot six inch block at neap tides " being two fathoms.

Dowson the decadent, the dreamer, the example of all that was terrible at the end of the nineteenth century, cut across a plank and was aboard before

I could say Jack Robinson. In a second he looked out at me from a forward porthole, and explained condescendingly, but with excitement and interest in his voice :

“ This is the *front*-part of the ship.”

“ Of course,” I replied.

I see his rather pale face even now, framed in the dark porthole, which he would have called a window.

He had not the lank hair of the typical poet, and his face was not the long one of the bards. His hair, a dark brown, was curly and wavy, and his eyes and face, in those days, without being beautiful, were agreeable and animated. He had only the remotest resemblance to Keats : he was quite individual. His dress, too, was peculiar to him. He wore, I fancy, what was then called a pea-jacket, dark trousers the worse for wear, and boots that arrested the attention by a certain quaintness. His collars were of the stick-up kind, not high, and I distinctly remember that he turned down one corner more than the other, and that the collar as a whole, like the boots, seemed moulded into folds of a sympathetic irregularity. He probably sported a black butterfly necktie, which he delighted in as being French. It was of the kind which you can buy for forty-five centimes or so, and it was fastened by a thin piece of elastic and a boot button.

I walked along the side of the dock, and with incredible speed, as of a lapwing, he was at the

stern, and looking out of another aperture in the dark tarry timbers he cried :

“ And this is the back part of the ship.”

He visited other parts of the vessel, and illuminated me on their uses as before. Then, rejoining me, he confessed ingenuously : “ Though I’m always here, I’ve never learnt the proper names for things.”

“ Not to indulge in technicalities is the hallmark of culture,” I remarked sententiously. Sententiousness used to please him in those early days, and it was only later on, when fatigue became his element, that he began to dismiss any laborious sally with a weary nod of abstract acquiescence.

“ My little brother,” he said, “ brings parties of boys from the Forest to play on the ships.”

How one envied them.

I came away from “ the dock ” delighted. It was all so jolly. That contact with reality—even if they are unconscious of it—is so good for poets. They should smell tar and hay ; they should rejoice in the open air, in things, in sport !

I sat down and wrote a *Globe* “ Turnover,” mainly in praise of this dock of Dowson’s (21st May 1889). The “ Turnover ” was a great institution in those days. There were said to be three hundred and ten briefless barristers in the Temple all busy writing them.

“ There are old-world offices in existence in London even now which breathe a placid atmo-

sphere not to be matched among the turmoil of the outer world.

“ There are offices among the docks, on the shore of murky Thames, which should be full of inspiration to some at least of their inmates. Where the great lock-gates divide the dripping shadows of the dry dock from the main flood of the river stands an old-fashioned house of business. There are no tile-paved passages, no lift, no smart commissionaires here. To gain admittance to the sanctum where our friend the ‘ Dry Docker ’ transacts his leisurely affairs you must push strenuously through a heavy yard-gate, mount a wooden outside staircase, and knock and ring as though you were at the door of a private house. The rooms within once gained, you are wafted away from the nineteenth into the eighteenth century at once. A quaint hospitable scent of grog and stale tobacco assaults your nostrils pleasantly. Your eyes rest on comfortable ramshackle desks of some dark old wood, placed so that the writers at them may sit in arm-chairs and look askance at the vistas of the shining grey water outside—at the red sails of the slowly travelling hay-barges, and the dusky spars of innumerable far-travelled ships. Under your very nose is the figure-head, a smirking Black-eyed Susan, of some great sailing-ship which has been successfully enticed into this particular dock, with the traditional guinea for the captain to buy a new ‘ beaver ’ withal, and innumerable drinks to boat-swain and ship’s carpenter. The masts and spars

are bare of all canvas, unless we count the jerseys and ducks which flap from their washing-line between the main and mizen rigging. The decks are untenanted now, save by the cook's black boy and the master's mate's black cat. There is a sense of rest in the air: you know that now at any rate leviathans are taking their ease.

“Over there a bright handful of fire crackles in the fine old carved fireplace. The fireplaces, and especially the mantelshelves, of forgotten east end offices are often worthy of the most exacting modern art furnisher, and this one is no exception to the rule. Above it hang elevations, carefully traced on the now-faded parchment, much affected of vanished draughtsmen, representing the hulls, and sterns, and prows of antique three-deckers. There is a symmetry, a wealth of carven and gilded detail about the old ships of Nelson's day wherewith such offices as these seem quite in keeping. The maps on the walls, with their titles and dedications set amid profuse scrollwork and stereotyped flourishes of penmanship, are as venerable as the pictured men-of-war. This one was dedicated ‘to the gentlemen of New Lloyd's’ so long ago as 1816. It is a map of the world, and it represents Greenland intersected with numerous projected canals, all of which are destined to afford a north-west passage to China and the Indies. Central Africa, especially that part of it which Mr Stanley has lately traversed, is void, save for a terrific dragon which does duty

for an as yet undiscovered Aruwimi and Upper Congo. Australia is here written down New Holland, and the islands and seas of Japan are strangely mixed. There are marvellously-contrived corner lockers in this dreamful retreat of leisured business, and when the captain of the ship close at hand comes up to launch a complaint or make a payment—for his vessel is ‘going out’ to-night, and there will be much swearing and opening of lock-gates after dark—the cupboards are opened, and cigars and liqueurs, into the importation whereof we should not inquire too closely, are produced and discussed by the poor work-worn *plumitifs* and their guests.”

It was certainly an indiscretion of youth, for one should not make copy out of one’s friends’ possessions without first asking their leave.

Again I came back to the dock in trepidation. The elder Mr Dowson, the poet’s father, rushed at me and “scragged” my arm, as a schoolboy might.

“You villain, what do you mean by describing my dock in the papers?”

Then he showed me a great pile of *Globes* on the top of an old bureau.

“I give one to everybody who comes here,” he was so kind as to say.

To the elder Dowson, that delightful man of an older generation, the ancestral dock was a joy and a pride. It should have furnished Ernest, the son, with the tapestries he lacked. But he was a poet

of one landscape and of static time, like so many singers, notably perhaps old Frederick Tennyson, whose works were reprinted in the autumn of 1913. Max Nordau would have said of dear Ernest Dowson that his sensations were of the decadent order, and that he was subjective because he was unaware of the objective. Who knows?

Mr Dowson, senior, had been one longish voyage out of the dock, to the Azores, I think. It had lasted six weeks. As a young man he had fitted out a barge like a prehistoric house-boat, in which the staff of *Punch*, Sir F. (then Mr) Burnand among them, and other celebrities, including the great Swinburne himself, had cruised about in the offing of the dock, putting in at home from time to time, to take in supplies. He told me this and much else in many interviews. He confessed to me once at his own house that he was rather afraid of the younger generation, and of Ernest in particular.

Twice I visited father, mother and son at their home in the outskirts of Epping Forest. A pleasant memory remains of a dark house, where hospitality flourished, and in a study, the sanctum of father and son, there was an arm-chair with prodigiously long arms. In the drawing-room was the portrait by Wills of the poet as a little child.

We left the curious suburb where the Dowsons then lived close to the high walls of a vast garden, sepulchral with ancient evergreens, where a family of old Quaker ladies were being buried at intervals

in a strange private mausoleum. To a man whose life has been spent mainly in the south of England everything to the north of the Thames, and in the eastern counties, seems to contain an element of the outlandish.

In the course of a rambling walk in the sight of scattered offshoot groves of Epping Forest we sighted long lines of funerals, scudding in the direction of Walthamstow. We counted three or four moodily and prophetically competing!

MARGINALIA

WRITING under two assumed names, of which I dare only quote one—"Anatole de Montmartre"—he joined with me and my then fellow-sufferer in lodgings and lifelong friend, Mr Frank W. Walton, now Librarian of King's College, London, in annotating a volume of "The African Farm," by Olive Schreiner. This was well before 1890. We wrote as German commentators of the classics, a race that had bothered us very much both at Tonbridge and Oxford, and we were abusive of one another and studiously pedantic, as dear old commentators should be, but M. de Montmartre annotated quite gravely—I feel sure of that. He belied his pseudonym, and set down his own views seriously and with care. They are of course fragmentary, but they are remarkable for a man of twenty one or two, and I remember they struck me at the time as singularly mature.

The German commentators, who rejoiced in the two principal names of Schnutzius and Hans Tübner, were somewhat annoyed by De Montmartre's refusal to play the game of solemn frivolity, but now his refusal has resulted in my still possessing a little anthology of his pencil marginalia, which is full of character and a curious

sidelight on his mind in 1888 and later, though it can in no sense be said to synthesise "a philosophy."

Dowson introduces himself by declaring that his most decadent friends regard him as somewhat of a heretic. Yet he is quite decadent in his first utterance, when he writes: "The conclusion of the whole matter," as comment on one of Miss Olive Schreiner's mottoes: "A striving and a striving and an ending in nothing."

Next we find him saying that some of the accomplished writer's phrases are "symbolic of the entire inefficacy of all spiritual, supernatural help in one's sorest need"—surely a strange phrase from a future convert to faith. And so is this in allusion to the passage in the text of the novel—"When the little weary lamb we drive home drags its feet, we seize on it, and carry it with its head against our face. His little lamb!" "By a similar process," says Ernest Dowson, "did the religious sentimental *man* invent the Immaculate Conception. Cf. Zola's 'Faute de l'Abbé Mouret,' Book I." Now, as every comparative religionist knows, nothing of that kind was ever invented by any man. It grew.

Later on the same page he cries: "Hélas, hélas, for the utter materialism of the feminine nature." Then comes a dictum he was fond of quoting: "The first theologic maxim which ever profoundly impressed me was Stendhal's "La seule chose qui excuse Dieu c'est qu'il n'existe pas"—a facile blasphemy comparable to a famous present-day

philosopher's allusion to the bankruptcy of the Eternal, which he reserved for the occasion when he first made his appearance as a preacher in a Nonconformist pulpit.

When Schnutzius and Tübner were debating the authoress's dicta as to "wickedness" he cries: "Nay, O Schnutz (or Tübner), why decide . . . at all?" But he is himself decisive. "Whether a man believes in a human-like God or no is a small thing," says Olive Schreiner. And Dowson: "This is a profound saying. Theism, Pantheism, Christianity, Positivism—they lie so close together that it is like splitting hairs to consider them apart. The vital issue is between optimism and pessimism." Again, " ? Nature = God = Infinite Evil—so to the pessimist this solatium is denied." This in allusion to some optimist passage.

"Ere our death-day, Faith, I think, does pass, and Love, but Knowledge abideth. Let us seek Knowledge. At least let us shun emotion as we would hell, for which it is a synonym. Let us live in ourselves and for ourselves. A reasonable self-love, without passion or thought of others, and with the end of self-culture before us, is better than a million emotions."

"Corollary—let us shun emotion and seek knowledge only." And again, near the end of the book: "O. S. seems to admit that the ideal State is to be without hate, or love, or hope, or fear, or desire—passionless."

Of annihilation he writes as of "an everlasting

conscious inanition." He apparently quotes a phrase, and one asks: "If there be consciousness, how can there be annihilation?" "Surely," he says, "annihilation is not horrible," though hell and heaven are horrible conceptions.

"There must be a Hereafter because man longs for it" (SCHREINER).

"A very weak argument. A man may long for water in Sahara, but he doesn't always get it" (E. D.).

"I object most strongly to a personal immortality."

"Immortality! Wretched ideal. Infinite ennui—I die at the thought."

Of a character in the "African Farm," who was in the habit of locking himself up in his room with books and a bottle of brandy, of which he preferred the latter, Dowson says: "Why not? It is the next best philosophy to suicide or fakir-like asceticism—the latter best of all—only, alas! the flesh is weak, weak."

"Self-contempt is respectable. Because we strike a compromise with a loathsome existence and take spleenfully the few poor gifts of the gods, brandy, etc., shall Schnutz join with Eliza Cook"—one of our doubles—"and call us mere beasts?" De Montmartre refers him to his approaching volume, "Sacraments du Dégout." 3 fr. 50 (LEMAIRE).

Miss Schreiner makes one of her characters suppose that, if wine, philosophy and women

keep the dream of life from becoming a nightmare, so much the better.

“ They at least, women,” cries Ernest Dowson, of course always in his assumed character, “ are hardly fit even for that. They make it a worse nightmare than ever.”

Of a passage which he does not like he cries : “ Typical inherent *bassesse* in woman’s nature—the brutal method, the only method with woman—*e.g.* the perverse pleasure (to be observed in a hundred cases) with which a woman sets herself to degrade and obliterate the feminine ideal if she comes across a man with any faith in it.”

Manifestly here is the timid young male spirit clothing itself in the defensive garment of misogyny. Most young poets have passed through that phase.

“ Men,” says Olive Schreiner, “ are like the earth and we are the moon ; we turn always one side to them, and they think there is no other, because they don’t see it—but there is.”

“ And the reverse instance is as true,” follows Dowson’s comment—“ only women don’t believe we have another side than the obvious one, even when we show it.”

At the end of “ Waldo’s Stranger ” he gathers regretfully that his fellow-commentators do not share his admiration for this most striking chapter (chapter ii., part ii.).

He returns to his misogyny and we must remember that he is still very young.

He believes, perhaps with his tongue in his cheek, "that women are several incarnations behind men (as cats are behind dogs), and that they entirely lack a certain spiritual principle which exists even in the most bestial man."

"Lyndall is a charming, pathetic, typical figure, typical of the nineteenth century, with its spleen, its self-consciousness, its fine ideals and its perpetual falling between them, its unrest and its dominant note of ineffectuality, of sensuality which it cannot escape from nor frankly accept, but can simply temporise with and despise."

The devil, who sends children, according to a character in the novel, is, according to Ernest Dowson, "'the Evil Will which baits its trap with the illusion Love and scatters the illusion to the winds when its purpose is fulfilled.' Cf. Schopenhauer's chapter on Sex and Desire. 'L'hammeçon est evident, et néamoin on y a mordu, on y mordra toujours'" (RENAN).

"Some say the Devil carried the seed from hell, and planted it on the earth to plague men and make them sin" (SCHREINER).

"A theological and figurative expression of my own theory" (DOWSON).

"'Se sacrifier à ses passions! passe. Mais à des passions qu'on n'a pas! Triste XIX^e Siècle!'" (STENDHAL, quoted thus by D.).

"Actually I doubt if passion ever did or could elevate a commonplace man to this extent" (in

reference to the episode of Gregory turning nurse). "Passion is waste—takes away from a man's stability, his self-centralization: its action on general culture, æstheticism, philosophy, many-sidedness, all that makes life endurable, is ruinous. It fastens on life like a cancer."

"Did Lyndall finally see passion, with Stendhal, as a lottery, 'bonheur cherché par des fous, duperie certaine'?"

Summing up, Ernest Dowson finds that his two chief collaborators are hopelessly tainted with sentimentalism. As Anatole de Montmartre, "he is more often in sympathy with Blotzius, and will be happy to revile a most abominable world with him over an absinthe at any time. Strangely enough, with Miss E. Cook he is more often *d'accord* than he would have believed. . . . From an entirely different point of view they deduce precisely the same practical corollary. For Schnutz, [De Montmartre] fears that only a deeper study of Schopenhauer and an adhesion to *some* of the tenets of Plato, will ever conduct him to Nirvana. In conclusion he has a deep distrust of the flowers that grow in the Garden of Propertius. And the fruit of that garden he avows to be Dead Sea Apples, whereof, if a man eats, he shall surely die."

Strange, is it not, to read all this? Much of it is trite and trivial enough. Young Oxford of the eighties was pessimistic: it affected, here and there, to worship Buddha, and it read its Schopen-

hauer and much else. And Ernest Dowson read his Stendhal.

But, conversely, much more of this is extremely interesting. As I write, at Christmas time 1913, a few weeks before the anniversary of my friend's death nearly fourteen years ago, the programme of last Sunday's Queen's Hall Concert comes to hand. One of the pieces was Granville Bantock's "Comedy Overture," "The Pierrot of the Minute," of which the libretto is Ernest Dowson's. In giving some account of "the unfortunate poet," Mrs Rosa Newmarch quotes Mr Arthur Symons' characterisation of Dowson's art. "He had the pure lyric gift, *unweighted or unballasted by any other quality of mind or emotion.*"

I have ventured to italicise. Yet here, surely, and in some preceding pages, we have had evidences of "quality of mind," and of emotion we shall have evidence later on. Emotion?—his life was an agony of emotion!

To me, who knew a few of the facts and am guessing others in sorrowful retrospect, the miracle of Ernest Dowson was his conversion—in every sense of that word.

Here is a lurid, woman-hating sceptic, who, in a year or two, becomes a convert to Rome, believes, takes the significance of gems seriously, falls in love!

Perhaps, indeed, the best reason for Ernest Dowson's early production of exquisite poetry

was this—that he was preparing to fall in love. He fell in love, or fancied that he did. His love-affair was, it struck me from the first, a matter of imagination, or of common form, which ended by being a torture. I cannot enter into it.

We do not, I trust, even in memoirs, desecrate the arcana of others, the sanctities which, in given cases, we cannot at all understand. Had my beloved friend lived fifty years ago, instead of fifteen, I might, perhaps, as an octogenarian, have attempted an analysis of his case, into the secret of which he affectionately inducted me perhaps more than anyone else now living. As it is, I decide to pass it over.

Yet the poet's love affair, far more than his conversion to Rome, is the well-spring of his spirit in the letters which follow.

In 1892 the aimless young fellow, full of dreadful views on marriage and the rest, has become a chastened lover, just as, at Missolonghi, the coxcomb Byron became a hero.

Alas! the reticence, which is perhaps the quintessence of criticism and biography, compels me to omit passages, nay to suppress whole letters of great beauty, which some ruthless hand may give to the Press a century hence. But omission is what he would have desired. He ends one notable letter with the word "tacendum," sometimes the kindest watchword in reminiscences.

Could the daringly unconventional love affairs of two young poets, both constitutionally timid,

be made public and set out in detail—could love be made the clue to his changed mood, these letters would be fully explanatory of themselves. As it is, I shall have to base them on mystery and thus allow them to blossom the more for those who read reverently between the lines.

ON RE-PRINTING A POET'S LETTERS

VAGRANT and fragrant as June's midnight breeze,
Transient as a child's sorrow, yet as true,
Faint as shell-murmurs of forgotten seas,
 These phrases writ by you !

Why print them ? Wherefore not, since they assert
Your spirit's charm, and bring to some again
Your high and musing features still unhurt,
 Still untransformed by pain ?

Since, too, the tongue of Cavil wags, why not
Draw back your very soul through Death's dark doors,
And from the mirror of the Present blot
 An image nowise yours ?

V. P.

THE LETTERS ¹

I

ALMOST my first letter from him was dated from 15 Bristol Gardens, Maida Hill. It may date from 1891 or early in 1892.

“ CARO MIO,—Can you come and have supper with us here, next Sunday about 8? There is a certain W—d P—k, of treasure hunt fame, of Oxford and of Allahabad to be with us, whom my father thinks you might care to meet. . . . There is much to be said. I am down in Gehenna; I hope you are up in the clouds. . . . From every point of view this is a tedious world, unhappily rendered so perhaps, more than it need be, by foolish conventionalities and proprieties of one’s relations and friends; and by the entire lack of charity in one’s scandal-loving acquaintance. No more. Tuissimus,

“ (*Signed*) ERNEST DOWSON.”

His letters are rarely dated, and it has not been easy to place them. The following one, however, is of an early period. The next belongs to the time

¹ These are reprinted almost exactly as written, the French being non-italicised.

of the publication of the "Book of the Rhymers' Club," early in 1892.

He writes from 15 Bristol Gardens :

"CHER VIEUX,—What must you think of me ? It must be three weeks since I wrote you a ream of spleen, having incidentally to say how grieved I was not to be able to join you and Hillier on a certain Sunday. And, a day or two ago, I found I had posted the letter in a pocket ! . . . May we meet soon in Valhalla at anyrate. for after Götterdämmerung there is haply Valhalla, and I think this is the twilight of the gods : but what I mean exactly, I could put more precisely in a sonnet, which might be found obscure. What are you doing ? If you have a spare moment, write to me ; your letters appeal to my *τό τε ἦν εἶναι* more than anything : or what are you not doing ? which is generally the most important form of action ! I do nothing, live in a sort of dream, of nothing : and I have never before lived to such an exhausting extent. To find an irrational residuum in oneself, eluding one's last analysis, is by some strange freak reasonably a consolation. Does not a great, personal passion become a whole metaphysic ? At least an abstract metaphysical notion, or a sacrament, or a mystery, or a miracle, in certain lights, becomes more credible than any material thing or appearance, one's mere going or doing, or talk or juxtaposition or the death one will die.]

“But I don’t want to send you an essay on the absolute, and will conclude with a prayer for forgiveness, for these random impressions. But I wanted to write a word to you ; and this by the way, because of all men I know you are most likely to find me intelligible. Though I have done, nor said, nor suffered anything tangible since I last saw or wrote to you, I write as an *illuminato*: I seem to have seen mysteries, and if I fail to be explicit, it is because my eyes are dazzled.

“I have not seen anyone very lately—until a few days ago, that is—not so much for any ailment as for a great lack of energy which has come over me.” Referring to a conversation with Lionel Johnson he continues: “I confess, however, that I have long passed the point at which one is seriously moved by hostile criticism of anybody in these questions or can feel any more than a tolerant contempt for the point of view from which it is uttered. To take the world so seriously! Enfin c’est trop bête. God or the Flesh or the Devil—an artist may be in bondage to any one or other or all of these Powers and retain his self-respect—but the world mustn’t, positively *must* not exist for him—or so much the worse for his art. Cher Poëte je vous embrasse. My mother has been very ill, is still unaccountably weak ; after six weeks of the influenza with complications she can still scarcely walk across the room. These

are parlous times. Would God we were all in Samoa, with others. The Rhymers' Rhymes are out: and a copy for each poem of every contributor is at our disposal."

BRIDGE DOCK;
LIMEHOUSE, E.

"CARISSIME,—Yes: there is a copy of the Book of Rhymes for each poem, which will mean, will it not, that there are five awaiting you somewhere. The person to apply to, I believe, is not Elkin Mathews, but Greene of Pembroke Gardens, unless perhaps the two advance copies which were brought to each contributor, to the Cheshire, on the last meeting, and which are all I have at present, may have been handed on to Johnson to be forwarded to you.

"The book is very good—better than I expected, although the binding leaves much to be desired. And I still hold, that certain rejections amongst your poems are at least as charming as certain of the selected.

"Your letter surprises me, yes! it certainly surprises me."

Here follows a lecture from Lionel Johnson; ending, "impracticable, and foolish, and irresponsible. As you say, however, what does it matter?—since to-morrow one dies! The criticisms of one's friends—'rumores senum severiorum'—allons donc! No—

“ Non ego nunc tristes vereor, mea Cynthia, manes,
 Nec moror extremo debita fata rogo :
 Sed ne forte tuo careat mihi funus amore,
 Hic timor est ipsis durior exequiis.”

These, the opening lines of *Elegy XIX.*, Book I., of Propertius, may be roughly Englished :

“ Sweet one, I fear not now the ghostly state,
 Nor would I hinder what I owe to fate !
 But lest thy love desert me on my pyre,
 'Tis this I fear more than the funeral fire !”

Ernest Dowson loved his Propertius, and the same may be said of Goethe, who never read the *Elegies* “ ohne eine Erschütterung.” One wonders where and when the poets read. There is a singular, a poignant parallelism between the great and prolonged *cri du cœur* of the old Roman and the modern's sorrowful lament, as expressed, for instance, in his *Cynara* poem,¹ the boldness of which is august with the spirit of antiquity, as though the pagan had passed into and inspired the unhappy lad of the day before yesterday. The grave people, doubtless not readers of the classics, who find much to shock them in this poem, must bear in mind the possibility of these transmigrations of spirit, or, as you will, survivals. And let them turn, too, to the older master and, among his trivialities and his sensuousness, experience their

¹ “Cynara” was suggested to Dowson by the *Cinara* of Horace, celebrated in Book IV. of the *Odes*, and doubtless an actual woman unlike *Lalage* and others. See *Carm. Lib. IV.*, i., ll. 3-4. Horace suggested, but Propertius inspired.

Erschütterung when they light on such splendid passages, so thrilled with the pure religion of the lover, as this :—

“ Tu mihi sola domus, tu, Cynthia, sola parentes,
Omnia tu nostrae tempora laetitiae.
Seu tristis veniam, seu contra laetus amicis :
Quicquid ero, dicam, Cynthia causa fuit.”

“ You are my home ancestral : Cynthia, you
Are as a father and a mother to me.
And every hour of joy that I ensue
Is Cynthia. If with thoughts that half undo me
I walk, or if with smiles my friends I meet :
Whate’er I shall become, I’ll say,—‘ My sweet
Was cause thereof.’ ”

The English will not do at all. Either, with Keats, one introduces an Elizabethan element into an imitation of the ancient manner, or an element of humour, of triviality. The translator is a traducer in any case. He cannot grapple with the terseness of a tombstone text. I remember, in horrible Fleet Street days—Fleet Street is, of course, quite different now—shortly before Dowson’s letter was written to me, a poor old Polish prince of an extreme antiquity of race being roared to at intervals, as thus : “ There’s nothing in French that can’t be put in fewer words in honest English ! Put that in your pipe and smoke it, Smithius ! ”

Smithius was the poor old prince’s Fleet Street incognito. He spoke French when not speaking

broken English : he had been one of Napoleon III.'s secretaries with Alphonse Daudet.

But this is not true. French and Latin are monumentally terse just where English is not, and vice versa. It was left to Ernest Dowson to reproduce something of the Latin brevity and clarity in his verse. I fancy that he consciously strove after that. We strive for nothing now but to be queer, and, as there are only a limited number of permutations and combinations in the algebra of ideas, we have sometimes to turn aside and be merely insane. To insanity, delirium and mysticism vast unmapped spaces are open.

I return to the letter. It is impossible to quote what Lionel Johnson said, for here we should be treading on the ground which is forbidden. Poor Johnson, who was so fond of saying, half humorously : " Respectability is the best policy " !

The " to-morrow one dies " phrase recurred constantly in Dowson's talk. "*Après nous le déluge*" was almost his motto. The young men of the Decadence were for ever acting and speaking as though after their time all would be chaos, and yet that period is twenty years ago, and they are many of them dead, and everything goes on as usual. There is the same crush of traffic outside the Bank of England, as Matthew Arnold prophesied to the old gentlemen that there would be if the old gentlemen were to perish on a sudden.

The letter ends :

“ Pardon these incoherencies and accept my gratitude for your charming sympathy. Tout a toi,

“ (*Signed*) ERNEST DOWSON.

“ *P.S.*—The latest Rhymer is one Barlas,¹ a charming poet and anarchist, who was lately run in for shooting the House of Commons. And the latest news—that Gray, of whom I am seeing a good deal just at present, pursues the ‘ Star ’ for a libel asserting him to be ‘ the original Dorian of that name.’ This will be droll.”

Discussing the first “ Book of the Rhymers’ Club ” in February 1892 he says :

“ I am amused to find that my cursory acquaintance with the Anthology of Anthologies has made such a deep impression on my manner—or can it be that my reviewer does not know what the Gr. Anthology is about ?

“ I didn’t go to the Rhymers last night, nor to the last meeting but one, chiefly because the meetings were in inaccessible places and the night was cold, and partly because I was in a condition too lyrical even for the society of poets. So I have not run across Greene ; but you will be glad to hear that the Edition is entirely exhausted. . . . In effect

From *The Times* obituary, August 1914.—“ On the 15th inst., at Glasgow, John Evelyn Barlas, B.A., New College, Oxford (‘ Evelyn Douglas ’), aged 54.”

I am become far too absorb to do anything but sit, in —, and gather the exquisite moments. For—to quote mes derniers :—

“ ‘The wisdom of the world said unto me.’ ”

Here follows the MS. of his “*Sapientia Lunae*,” which will be found at p. 50 of “*Verses*.”

In allusion to Professor Image’s kindly and dignified notice of the Rhymers’ Book he adds :

“ *P.S.*—Dear Image ! How charming his notice is.”

“ BRIDGE DOCK, LIMEHOUSE.

“ *May* 19, 1892.

“ I myself have had one of the worst rheums within my memory.”

Referring again to the Rhymers’ Club meetings he says :

“ It is ages since I have managed to go to one ; as a rule now I am too chronically irritated to go anywhere, except at rare, precarious intervals when there happens to be nowhere to go, and nothing to do. I am making rhymes in the meantime and trying to write a short story. Is your Muse fertile just now ? ”

The mention of the death of Tennyson, which occurred on 6th October 1892, dates the next letter. Ernest Dowson had, at that time, perhaps already begun to pay his customary week-end visits to us at Blackheath, where my wife and I

lived after our marriage in August 1892. He might well have been with us at Haslemere in the autumn of that year, when my mother and I caught our only glimpse of her idol, the august old Laureate, as he took his last drive abroad, accompanied by a sick-nurse.

“*CHER VIEUX*,—I have had a great many tedious things to do ; I have also had a cold : they are both now arranged to a certain extent, and I am able to do what I should have done before. . . . Were you at the Rhymers last night ? I wish I could have managed to be of the party. I suppose it is settled that we are to hold the Laurelship as a corporate office, and present the butt of Canary to the patron du Cheshire, as a composition for free drinks. [I am sorry that Tennyson has crossed the bar : if only, that it leaves us so much at the mercy of L. Morris, Austin et Cie.] But he was un grand poète, tout de même. [Above all I love him because he did sacredly hate the mob, which whether it be the well-dressed mob whom Browning pandered to, or the evil-smelling mob to which William Morris does now to the detriment of his art and the offence of his own dignity still pander, I hold alike to be damnable, unwholesome and obscene.] . . My muse awoke from her torpor of many months yesterday : here is her feeble utterance, but she may run to another verse by and by.”

There follows the MS. of “ In Autumnn.”

It will already have become apparent from these letters that Dowson was a devotee of the Rhymers' Club, but I do not remember him there, and probably missed him as I always missed my friend Mr Richard Le Gallienne. The notable Rhymers I remember well were John Davidson, Lionel Johnson and Mr Yeats. Once the two last, Dowson, and myself remained at a meeting in Johnson's rooms after the rest had gone. Mr Yeats proposed that we should in future debate on poetry, and by way of beginning he made a speech, pointing out that poetry had at one time passed through four stages, which were, I think, the Diabolic, the Seraphic, the Celestial, and something else. In the interests of truth it fell to my ungrateful lot to point out that poetry originated among savages and consisted at first of not much more than lists of laudatory titles, chanted again and again by hunters or warriors in praise of the successful man among their number. Ernest Dowson scented modern science here, became uneasy, and voted down poetry debates in future.

From one point of view he was right, for, at the present moment, "chatter about Shelley," and poetry debate generally, account for much of our sterility, timidity and lack of enthusiasm.

The Rhymers held one memorable meeting in Mr Herbert Horne's rooms in the Fitzroy settlement. They were then, so to speak, rediscovered and reconstituted, having previously been but a small group of Dublin poets. It was an evening

of notabilities. Mr Walter Crane stood with his back to the mantelpiece, deciding, very kindly, on the merits of our effusions. And round Oscar Wilde, not then under a cloud, hovered reverently Lionel Johnson and Ernest Dowson, with others. This must have been in 1891, and I marvelled at the time to notice the fascination which (poor Wilde exercised over the otherwise rational. He sat as it were enthroned and surrounded by a deferential circle. Describing the scene from hearsay, my friend Mr Morley Roberts declared that Wilde wore a black shirt front and that Dowson and Johnson, small fairy creatures in white, climbed about upon it. Of the close of this meeting, or of a quite other gathering in my own rooms in January, 1892, the same brilliant weaver of fancies declared that all the people present clasped hands and whirled down the stairs like human catherine wheels, striking sparks as they went on the stone stairs, where to this day hang Professor Image's fine cartoons of Saint Peter and other saints.

Music at all times is much more popular than poetry, and now that Mr Granville Bantock's setting of Dowson's "Pierrot of the Minute" is becoming a *pièce de résistance* at classical concerts the ghostly poet is likely to ride into a greater vogue on the shoulders of sound.

"This graceful phantasy," says Mrs Newmarch, "with its setting that recalls some exquisite scene

by Fragonard, is full of suggestion to a composer of quick imagination, and Bantock has responded with an almost lavish wealth of thematic material. Motive succeeds motive as quickly as thoughts pursue each other in a dream. . . . The work is scored for piccolo, two flutes, one oboe, two clarinets (A and B flat), one bassoon, three horns, two trumpets, one trombone, timpani (chromatic), tambourine, glockenspiel, triangle, harp, and the usual strings, *divisi*."

How would the retiring poet, who hated the mob and dreaded any battalion that advanced in more than twos and threes, have been staggered by this regiment of instruments! I can see him now, in my mind's eye, musing on the situation with pouting lip and fixity of rounded orb, and afterwards with a shrug and a kind of half smile, as though, seeing that he rather suspected humour as such, he nevertheless liked the recognition, the publicity, the glory, and was not sure whether to laugh or not.

Yet Dowson's poetry has a kind of kinship to a certain sort of music, though he used to quote with amusement Gautier's dictum that music is the most disagreeable of sounds. His lovely poems that spring out so suddenly and inevitably among the classicisms, the verbiage, the prose poetry and futurist experiments of others, can truly be compared to some melody by some great composer who forgot for the nonce to be a great composer, as did the dying Schubert when he perhaps wrote the score

of that sublime and longing lyric that is the theme of his "Unfinished Symphony" (First Movement).

By the by, I have no recollection of Dowson's laughter at any time. Some otherwise cultivated people we remember always by their cynic or hyæna guffaw, which might burst out on one's grave, but I fancy I never heard Dowson laugh, though his low and somewhat broken voice half remains in recollection. He refused ever to recite his verses at the Rhymers' meetings, declaring that he had no gift that way. He shuddered at that kind of publicity, and left the task to others—to Lionel Johnson, perchance, who read marvelously, as a man *periturus*, or to Mr W. B. Yeats, whose half-chant is incomparable.

Writing on 24th October 1892, we find our poet in the throes of Pierrot composition. Many times he referred in conversation to the difficulties which he experienced when writing to order. Alas! towards the close of his life he did little else.

"I have been frightfully busy, having rashly undertaken to make a little Pierrot play in verse for Peters,¹ which is to be played at Aldershot, and afterwards at the Chelsea Town Hall: the article to be delivered in a fortnight. So until

¹ In his published letters Aubrey Beardsley writes at this time of making drawings for a tiresome playlet of Ernest Dowson's! The principal parts were taken by the late Theodore Peters and Miss Beardsley, sister of the artist, and the play was produced at the Albert Hall Theatre.

this period of severe mental agony be past, I can go nowhere. . . . I searched for you at the Independent Theatre the other night, but you were not. Meeting there, along with many other persons, the poet Green, I undertook to send out notices for a Rhymers' meeting au Cheshire on Friday next the . . . Will you take this in lieu of a post-card and endeavour to come. I have a quaint old German coming . . . whom you will appreciate.

"L. J. was here on Sat. and slept here. He told me that your Chouan poem, which I like immeasurably, has been taken by Macmillan : My congratulations ! I have a map of Morbihan hanging up over me now : mine eyes water at the sight of it. Quousque tandem, Domine ! . . . I would this play were done : half of it is completed and I have seven days more, but the second half is mightily oppressing me. And I am horribly afraid that when it is written I may be worried with rehearsals and enforced company with terrible South Kensington young ladies and fashionable Chelsea mesdames. Have you heard that Horne is now in the Temple and the sacred house in Fitzroy Street is full of men who know not Joseph ? "

The sacred house, about which a volume might be written, had, from about the year 1891, been the home of the *Hobby Horse* writers, and of at least one outsider. My dear friend Professor

Selwyn Image still lives there, and will he forgive me if I remind him that the house was at one time referred to as "Fitzroy" and that "Fitzroy" was a movement, an influence, a glory? There were several Fitzroy institutions—notably what was known as "Fitzroy silence" at our austere dinners and lunches. Lionel Johnson, when I left "Fitzroy," declared that it became full of strong mysterious men, who clamoured for large chops and steaks at meals. They are probably very eminent persons by this time.

The original dwellers in "Fitzroy," before my time, were Mr Herbert Horne, who with Professor, then Mr, Selwyn Image edited *The Hobby Horse*, Mr Galton, editor of Matthew Arnold and Lionel Johnson, Mr Arthur Macmurdo, and Lionel Johnson himself. Professor Image at that time kept a studio there, as did the late Mr Machlachlan the landscapist. Mr Randall Davies studied design under Mr Macmurdo and the late Hubert Crackanthorpe was for a time a pupil of Professor Image. Numbers of other distinguished people visited this artistic colony. The list of them would include Mr Mortimer Menpes, Mr Frank Brangwyn (a constant visitor), Mr Walter Crane, the late Oscar Wilde, Mr Dolmetsch, Mr Ernest Rhys, Mr W. B. Yeats, Mr Will. Rothenstein, Father John Gray, the Rev. Stewart Headlam, and a host more. Ernest Dowson had lunched there in the earliest days and had made me emulous to enter the sacred precincts. As a later member of

“Fitzroy,” in succession to Mr Galton, I had the honour of introducing our foreign discoverer, M. George Olivier Destrée, then editor of *La Jeune Belgique*, and now Father Bruno, into the charmed circle.

“I must look you up at King’s soon,” the letter concludes. “. . . In the meanwhile a dyspeptic little poem ‘to His Lady and His Friend.’ ”

There follows the glorious “In Tempore Senecutis,” with its motto from the Vulgate: “Junior fui etenim senui ” (Ps. xxxvii. 25).

The next letter, dated in January, 1893, begins a prolific epistolary period. He alludes in it to one of the Rev. Stewart D. Headlam’s Church and Stage parties, which took place always in January, and were a brilliant and picturesque episode in the crowded artistic life of the early nineties. They should be put on record. The customary scene in his beautiful drawing-rooms will remain impressed on the minds of his many grateful guests.

THE LETTERS

II

“DEAREST VIEUX,—It is I, who should apologise for taking leave of you so cavalierly. It was a charming visit ; my gratitude to you all for the same. . . . Were you at Headlam’s ? I was too sick and sorry to come. I fear my affairs will not bear talking over, or writing about. They are like a Chinese puzzle ; and grow more confused and inextricable the closer one considers them. I endeavour to possess my soul in patience, but the result is not so much resignation as a sort of sloth and tristitia ; ‘which even monkish moralists have held to be of the nature of a sin.’ It is a vile and stupid world ; and it will be good to have done with it. In the meantime, ever yours,

“ (*Signed*) ERNEST DOWSON.

“P.T.O. — Appended the last effort of my muse.”

This is “Terre Promise,” that lovely three-verse poem, which appears at p. 34 of “Verses.” He dates it 16th January 1893.

To the late Professor Warr, who was in search of an accomplished young fellow to read German and play the violin to an old invalid gentleman, I recommended Ernest Dowson, for he was in those days always in quest of some sort of permanent employment apart from the dock. The poet, I knew, was no violinist, but it was supposed that he might make up in general culture and charm for the lack of musical accomplishment. His German, also, was problematical, but again it was thought that German might be dispensed with if the candidate had once presented himself. He writes characteristically without date as usual.

“CHER VIEUX,—What must you think of me for the ungrateful silence? But I have been so beset with inevitable correspondence that I have not possessed my soul since I saw you. I interviewed Warr on Sunday concerning l'affaire Williams and learnt from him what I heard in your letter of Monday that a musician was required. But he was charming and I was glad to have met him. Also I believe secretly I was glad that the matter had fallen through for I have not the courage I fear to absent myself from —— St for so long.

“You will have seen perhaps some of our reviews. Their benevolence has taken my breath away. *The Speaker*, *Daily Chronicle*, *Telegraph*, *Scotsman*, all favourable, some of them gushing, and this week's *Graphic*, which has just come to hand.

So far the only downright bad one was in the *World*.

“I was staying with Teixeira¹ last night in the Temple, and sat up for long talking to Sherard who is there and who came over with Zola and is writing a biography of him for Chatto and Windus. He is charming but the most morose and spleenful person I have yet encountered. His conversation is undiluted vitriol—like the man—nescio quem in ‘La Première Maitresse.’ Also this morning Gray who is finally leaving the Temple—quantum mutatus ab isto—fat but friendly, I fear incurably given over to social things—and about to take up his abode in Park Lane! This is sad. I have to return you your Spenser.”

This agreeable epistle is libellous. We know what Mr Robert Harborough Sherard did for our poor friend. Ernest Dowson died in his arms. This artless first impression is curious in view of the affection that Dowson afterwards conceived for him.

Professor Warr, who, with the charming and accomplished Mrs Warr, is not in the index of Mr Holbrook Jackson’s “Eighteen Nineties,” was a force in his time. Somewhere in the mid-eighties, also a great period, he introduced Greek plays to London, and his *Tale of Troy*, followed up later in 1886 by the *Alcestis* at Queen’s College, Harley Street, were widely illustrated

¹ Mr Teixeira de Mattos.

and much discussed performances. All of us who had any hand in them were under the impression that nothing much in that line could happen after our time. The charming scenery—a Greek temple—was painted, I think, by Alma Tadema, but latterly Professor Warr found it difficult to dispose of. Mr Walter Crane helped him greatly in these performances, and pictures of them from his brush, as well as a delightful set of furniture from his designs, adorned the Warrs' beautiful house.

The Professor's death was very sudden. I had been to call on him one morning at King's College, Strand, and had handed to him Rostand's extraordinarily fine and, with us, unpopular poem on Kruger. He put it in his pocket, and at two o'clock, walking to the top of a steep staircase in the Temple, fell down dead of heart disease. His wife survived him for some years. She died of dysentery on board a ship travelling from Athens to Syracuse. Previously she had, as she told me, suffered greatly from malaria during an exploration of Etruscan cities in Italy.

The passing away of this most distinguished couple of the old school closed one of those admirable salons, admission to which was obtained by culture rather than by notoriety. Of such I know no example now. Another pair of childless couples, whose reminiscences and associations were almost historic, were Sir Joseph and Lady Prestwich of Oxford and Shoreham, and Sir John and Lady Simon of Kensington Square. One met

everybody in their salons. Sir John, for instance, had been the friend of Ruskin, whose executor he was in an early will, of Thackeray, Rossetti, Ellen Terry, William Morris—half the old glorious world that came before the Decadence. Dowson used to talk of visits to some wonderful old survivor of the time of Waterloo. The lady is doubtless historic. He went there with Lionel Johnson. She spoke of dancing with Benjamin Disraeli, and referred to “Young Mr Disraeli” and “Young Mr Gladstone.”

The Rev. Father Gray, apart in a life that necessarily cares little for the things of this world, will, I trust, forgive Ernest Dowson’s references to him. As priest he has perhaps long ago outsoared London. Besides, Dowson was much attached to him after all.

Can it be that I had been trying to induce my poet to read Herbert Spencer? I think not. The Spenser volume must have been an Edmund Spenser, the poets’ poet, but it is strange to reflect that, if so, he had not a copy of the “Faery Queene” in his own possession. He had not many books apparently at any time, and though he was a busy reader, he was curiously incurious about many departments of literature and erudition.

His lack of German was troublesome. I wanted him to translate Heine and other modern Teuton poets into English for the late Professor Buchheim, but he writes :

“CARO MIO,—I return your letter with abundant thanks for the offer. Alas! that it should be so, but my knowledge of German is so limited that I should be an encumbrance rather than an aid, if I accepted it I could only translate Heine from French translations, and that is scarcely what your friend would desire. And where would appreciation of the Heinesque style come in? I am afraid you must pass on this attractive opportunity to some one more competent.”

On “February 10? 1893” he wrote to me again once more in search of an employment. The letter is one of the very few to me that he ever dated, and even then the “10” is queried. He used business paper, and seemed in a strenuous mood. We have all the dimensions of his dock in the top left-hand corner.

“CHER VIEUX,—Yesterday an advt. in *The Times* was sent me, for a librarian, in a Public Free Library (under the Public Library Acts) . . . I have been advised to apply for this, I fear, not very desirable post, and I have thought that if you, with your official signature of Librarian . . . could give me a testimonial, I might stand some chance. Could you consider me then, in a short missive a competent person to hand out dime novels to transpontine shop boys? You might mention that I have a knowledge of French and Italian; and in fact—make the most of me.

“The office is really ‘*librarian and secretary*’: and not more than *three* testimonials are to be sent in. A proviso that some experience of a public library is required rather handicaps me, but it is worth trying for—£160 and an unfurnished apartment on the premises. I write to Sayle for another testimony, and for my third shall try and secure a word from some city functionary as to my business capacities. T. à t.

“(Signed) ERNEST DOWSON.

“Alas ! that I should have to write to you again so speedily in such a matter : this is truly descent from the clouds. Ma che vuole ? one must exist.”

It is melancholy to reflect on the great army of brilliant men who have spent anxious hours in their youth endeavouring to obtain positions and regular pay. The very culture of such men stands in their way, and this is a point they find it hard to understand. Yet one cannot imagine Dowson tied to the airless occupation he here proposed to himself. He would have wearied of it in a very short time. That he was businesslike and methodical when he liked is, however, proved by such letters as this. Indeed, poets are not the entire dreamers that they are popularly supposed to be. The very meticulousness required in minding and measuring iambs and especially in writing blank verse—that most difficult of tasks—

presupposes very much the same set of qualities as are required in affairs or in the prosaic paths of science and research.

Later he writes :

“ Very many thanks, indeed, for the testimony. I had your benevolent document with the others type-copied and sent them off yesterday, the latest possible day. I cut out a comment upon my German proficiency from yours, for alas ! my knowledge of that difficult but dear tongue is too rudimentary to be mentioned. I do not, for the rest, attach very much importance to the matter, for I am afraid it is too substantial[!] to be attainable. It is just worth applying for however, and in any result, I am infinitely obliged to you. . . . I cannot write a line of any kind just now : why, I know not.”

Would this kind of regular work have saved poor Ernest Dowson's life ? It is a question whether he would ever have tolerated the conditions of the career which he proposed to himself. There are erudite librarians, who, in the long run, grow sick of the faces of their books and cry with Solomon “ of the making of books there is no end.” One dear old gentleman confessed that he made regular war on what he called “ those rubbishy ancient tomes,” and assured me that he had burnt numbers of enormities (medical) published in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. And

another eminent man, not a librarian, but so well known that one may not write his name at large, tells me that he regularly burns a volume every evening of his life, as the seventeenth-century editors said, "to prevent the dissemination of false reports," or, as he phrases it, "error."

But I did once succeed in getting my friend a post of sorts. There appeared an advertisement in *The Athenæum*, I think, calling for a brilliant pen, wielded by a man of high social connections. I interviewed the editor, and was almost chosen myself, having proved my social connections and my pen to the top of my bent. The editor, who very properly valued blood and brilliancy with the pen, was a mystic, and, like Hermotimus, had spent much time outside the portals of his earthly tabernacle. He, at that first interview, told me that he had been to India in one night and thoroughly knew the look of it, and the feel of it. I envied him, for all our innumerable Anglo-Indian friends are always very silent on the matter of their long sojourns in that mysterious gorgeous East!

"Oh for the joy that might have been,
Oh for the joy that shall not be,
And that which thou hast never seen,
And that which thou mayst never see!"

Ernest Dowson joined the staff of the journal, a weekly of some dimensions, as assistant editor,

and contributed certain admirable papers thereto, notably "The Cult of the Child." But he severed his connection with it before very long.

It is as an adorer of childhood that his lovers and friends, who have kept his memory green, will best remember him !

All this happened in 1893, a period when his myth, as well as Aubrey Beardsley's, was in process of formation. By the American Mr Talcott Williams, and *mutatis mutandis*, by Mr → Arthur Symons the melancholy or lurid myth of Ernest Dowson will inevitably be perpetuated. "Born in 1867, he died in 1900, having thrown away his life in such reckless and foolish dissipation as comes to few—Dowson had the best of life before him, and chose the worst. Nor is there aught which furnishes excuse for this in the brief life prefaced by Arthur Symons."

By "prefaced" one understands "written as preface": otherwise I should have been tempted to say I do not know what Mr Arthur Symons wrote as introduction to his classical life of Ernest Dowson in "The Collected Poems of Ernest Dowson" (1909). But I rejoice in the knowledge that, so far as Ernest Dowson is concerned, the American critic has been "side-tracked." Dowson, → as Mr Edgar Jepson rightly protests, was *not* "an unpleasant sort of wastrel."

I failed to make my friend a colleague in librarianship, but we were colleagues for a moment in journalism, for the very day that I received my

first appointment as an academic librarian in 1890, I was also appointed editor of a small society weekly. There are few moments of pure joy in the life of the average scholar and gentleman, who has to pay income-tax on a war footing while his acquaintances play at Fabianism, but I shall never forget my joy in at once resigning this editorship, my pride, my glowing conceit, as of the dear old Pharisee who was not as other men are, or the dear old Quaker who had never committed a sin and wondered to my mother why people made such a fuss about their sins. They must be posing—those people! As well talk about their hats!

Ernest Dowson, on his side, failed to make me a much-read poet, though such was his modesty that for long ere the publication of his "Verses" we had discussed a joint production, the title of which exercised us considerably. I suggested "Vine-leaf and Violet," and he wrote the introductory lines, the MS. of which I hold in my hand at this moment. The search for pretty and rather absurd titles was more fashionable twenty years ago than now. Our discussions ended in nothing, and "Vine-leaf and Violet" figures as "A Coronal with His Songs and Her Days to His Lady and to Love." It is an honourable, if thrifty, final destination. Lionel Johnson perhaps was to have been a third collaborator with us. Hence, possibly, the following letter, which may, however, refer to the Rhymers' Book.

“ CHER VIEUX,—Do you like the enclosed verses enough to include them in the Book in lieu of ‘ Benedictio Domini ’ ? Johnson, to whom I have conveyed the weighty packet, seems to like them the best of my budget. He was very amiable and we drank much absinthe together. I vote for six of your poems with much difficulty for I liked all so much that I wished to see them all included. I placed the ‘ Cinerarium,’ ‘ Breton Beggar ’ and ‘ Nejnun ’ first. Of L. J.’s I think I most admired the ‘ Cavalier and Mystic.’ Verlaine is after all still in London. I am dining with Horne and Horne Père at the Constitutional to-night to meet him. So that if I have the courage I will even suggest to the master that he should honour his disciples with a visit to the Cheese. À bientôt—with all amenities to mesdames votre mère et votre femme et à cette chère Bébé. T. à toi.

“ (*Signed*) ERNEST DOWSON.”

Pray, courteous reader, do not accuse me of vanity because I recopy this letter in full. Believe me, I am in no wise anxious to hook myself on to the skirts of the great, but since the great, whose myth is forming so portentously, wrote thus to me, I desire only to show matters in their then proportions.

In the years of the formation of the Dowson myth, which has now grown half diabolic, the poet was modest, charming, a boy. The Devil, a spirit of imperfect education, a rebel angel who had

refused to go through the mill, threw his shadow over our beloved poet's fame. And we, who are on the side of the Angels, refuse to give him up to the Demon, and shall die, some of us, still contesting the Dowson myth.

O my dear poet, would that you were back here to-night—would that you were back here, with musing eye and queer customary cigar, forcibly to repudiate some at least of those who have no right to abuse Davy Garrick! Alas, what a niche you are filling—a second Chatterton. The young fellows gaze on your friend as “the man who knew Dowson.” It is a case of Browning's “Death in the Desert,” or “Did you once see Shelley plain?” One has even heard of a “Dowson Club” being formed of late years.

On the back of the letter last quoted is the MS. of the incomparable, the beautiful “Supreme Unction,” than which perhaps no better poem has been written since. It is signed simply “E. D.,” by him who had asked: “Do you like the enclosed verses enough to include them in the Book?” Wonderful!

THE LETTERS

III

HE made a dash down to us when we were staying at Haslemere in March and April, 1893. He writes :

“ I hope you will not be too surprised with my audacious wire. I was meaning to stay on in town until Sunday at any rate, but my foreman’s youngest boy died here suddenly last night and the air is so depressing that I determined to go at once. . . . I *cannot* stay any longer in this atmosphere of dreariness and tears.”

It was Easter time, and on a hillside covered with dry bracken we sat in hot premature sunshine, and he read me Browning, especially “ The Grammarian’s Funeral ” and

“ Where the many-tinted end of sunset smiles.”

[An enthusiast for Browning’s shorter poems,] he indoctrinated me.

[Ernest Dowson in the country was a delight. Seeing an innocent newt walking out slowly on the

sandy road on the way to Professor Tyndall's house with its strangely blocked-out view of the adjoining dwelling and grounds, he announced with horror that the newt was a serpent, and arming himself with a large stake, which he kept in his hand for the remainder of the walk, he proceeded to belabour the little creature, which ended by being banged down, quite unscathed, in the deep sand.] He made me get another stick in case we met more dangerous reptiles.

At night, however, he really shone, for at our picnicky supper, he cooked an excellent dish of eggs in the Italian manner with oil, and with sage gathered in the little garden. To the poor little boy's death at the Dock we owed a delightful, artless glimpse of the poet making holiday.

His next letter contains matter for controversy, since anyone who remembers the Jubilee decorations of 1887—the tossing bower of roses, for instance, into which St James's Street was turned and the soft glow of numberless Chinese lanterns—and then compares the illuminations of Jubilee night with the hard gaseous excess on the Seine bridges on the *centenaire* night of the French Revolution in 1889, cannot but decide in favour of poor old London.

(July, 1893.)

“ I have been a wreck of this hot weather and of this base city's base outburst of snobbish sycophancy. [London on a gala day, when one

thinks of what Paris and Florence can manage, makes me think of an ugly, fat, vulgar old woman putting on the graces of coquetry:]one wants to hide one's face in one's hands. . You are fortunate to be out of it. It is *not* all over, yesterday was as objectionable as Thursday. I daresay it will be all right on Monday, and then I may hope once more to be in a reasonably good temper: the last three days have severely tried it. I shall think of you filling your green book on a mossy bank, O founder of the Haslemere school. Hillier ran down and lunched here t'other day on his way from the Lakes . . . he has a cottage without a name in a pathless wood: so I fear we shall never see him again. ——— was very ebullient all the week, and yesterday evening was sober for the first time since they began to put up the decorations. . . . If London increases in heat and aridity I suppose I shall have to retire from it for a brief space, but I *shall* hold on as long as I can. In ——— matters progress as well as I suppose they are likely to—I should think so probably if I had the great grace of patience; not possessing that, I die many deaths daily. Let me hear from you some day, and especially that you and your folk . . . are laying in copious stores of health. I shall probably bore you from time to time with my letters."

They were letters, indeed, which never bored, but were waited for impatiently by their recipients. I am sure I speak for a whole circle. He closes the

following missive with a quotation from, I think, Thomas Gray's correspondence, which at that time he read constantly.

"CHER VIEUX,—How are you all finding yourselves, and where ; and when are we going to meet again ? The whirligig of time has taken my people to world's end, which is called by the sublunary 'Chadwell Heath'—and there, I suppose, for the present I must pass penitential Sundays with much regret for your ancient, hospitable supper-table.

"I suppose you are away from town : most people are, I think, now. I have had a prolonged epistolary paralysis or I would have afflicted you with a letter before. In fact I have only just reminded myself to-day that Greene's letter demanding rhymes is still unanswered and likely to remain so. But I am trying to hunt up the necessary half dozen and will dispatch them : though I should think the Star Chamber will have decided by this time to dispense with me. The weather is—well, too damned hot to write about for fear of burning the paper with expletives. I imagine you in Devonshire, drinking cider, playing skittles and eating cream *du pays*. Write to me and assure me that this is so, or if not that you are at [home] and will look in upon me here one afternoon. I am verily, I believe, 'alone in London.' The darkness of the unknown has swallowed up Hillier, the provincial stage Marmie. . . . I do

not even attempt to write any longer, not even verses. My mental horizon doesn't extend beyond cooling drinks and cigarettes. Forgive this tedious letter. It is too hot to write letters : but on the other hand they are the only literature that is light enough for one to read—so I may conclude with an apt enough citation from a prince of letter writers though a most vile poet—(*pace* Matthew Arnold !)

“ ‘To be tiresome is the privilege of old age and absence ; I avail myself of the latter and the former I have anticipated. If I do not speak to you of my own affairs, it is not from want of confidence, but to spare you and myself. My day is over—what then ? I have had it. To be sure I have shortened it ; and if I had done as much by this letter, it would have been as well ! ’ ”

At the end of August he writes again :

“ CARO VECCHIO,—I am glad you have been to Greene, you will be able to make my peace with him. I sent off versicles of a sort to him before I left town—perhaps you saw them there—8 in all. . . . I have been reading ‘ Many Inventions.’ Mulvaney’s stories, above all ‘ Love o’ Women,’ like me most : après—‘ One View of the Question,’ a beautiful piece of satire on English mob-worship. . . . We have received the last proofs of *Comedy of Masks*. I have seen no one—suppose every one away.” ✓

The other half of the "we," who with him received last proofs, is, of course, his oldest friend, Mr Arthur Moore, collaborator in those exquisitely composed novels, of which Mr Moore is said by Mr Herbert Horne to have written alternate chapters. Collaboration is assuredly the supreme test of friendship and long-suffering.

On the birth of my daughter, on 2nd September 1893, he wrote to me the following pretty letter, and headed it "Cressa ne careat alba Dies!"¹—which is a reminiscence and a misquotation of Horace.

"MY DEAR VICTOR,—Your letter filled me with joy—with its double news. I send my very sincere congratulations, and all good wishes for the continued prosperity of the Bambina and the speedy recovery of the Donna.

The patronising saint of Sept. 2 according to the Roman calendar is St Stephen of Hungary—(St Etienne)—of whom I know not much. But in a Milan calendar I find the day set apart to a certain San Mansueto—of whom I know less—that is nothing—but whose name is excellently propitious. My compliments then to Mdlle. Etienne-Mansueta Plarr. I append certain versicles pseudo-18th-cent. with which she has already inspired me: may she be provocative of many more."

There follow his well-known lines, which are perhaps his sole venture in the manner of Pope, whom, however, he greatly admired:—

¹ "Cressa ne careat pulchra dies nota," *Carm.*, Lib. I. 36.

“ Mark the day white on which the Fates have smiled :
Eugenio and Egeria have a child,
On whom abundant grace kind Jove imparts
If she but copy either parent’s parts.
Then, Muses ! long devoted to her race
Grant her Egeria’s virtues and her face ;
Nor stay your bounty there, but add to it
Eugenio’s learning and Eugenio’s wit ! ”

The poem is the kind of impromptu that is written in the course of a letter, for it contains three erasures, but it is truly an exquisite compliment, from which all possibility of self-glorification on the part both of subject and dedicatees has been withdrawn now that it has been more than once reprinted without their names. One line is even cited by a writer, evidently not too conversant with Latin, to show that Dowson doted on the colour white !

It is a question whether it is more chastening for the literary to find that their estate in a famous poet’s poem has been reft away from them or to discover that a bantling of their own brains has become anonymous though printed as a “ Little Prose Classic for Children.” However, it is a comfort to reflect that suppressions and passings-over, which are akin to malice, can be set right in memoirs, or, better still, in library catalogues, which are forms of literature meant for posterity.

We were, of course, greatly touched by the lines, though one could have wished that a more Dowsonian metre had been adopted than the easily

written eighteenth-century couplet. Likewise, I was a little tickled at the thought that a baby, a descendant of generations of Huguenots, of a worshipper of the Goddess of Reason during the *Terreur*, and of a sceptical French savant, should have been even tentatively named after a saint in a Milan calendar. A grandfather and again his grandfather would have turned in their graves had the child been christened according to the dear poet's orders. One of them at least would have wished for such grand old eighteenth-century family names as Maria Salome, Maria Margareta, Amalia Franziska, and Frederica !

I did not point this out to the poet, but I think I did point out to him that to many of us in England it brings back the memory of Omdurman and to many more in France that of a national tragedy. "Sedan !" how well the baby's father and aunt had had that word driven into their childish brains when, as little creatures, in a beautiful wild forest near Sainte Odile in the Vosges, they saw one of their elders stop to talk to two ragged wayworn men in blouses, sitting by the side of the path. Men were these who rested dejectedly, with drooping heads and hanging arms. They brought the news of Sedan ! They could not believe the thing they told.

An hour afterwards all the old brown gnarled hands at the Convent of Sainte Odile were being wrung by refugee peasants, by nuns and monks who had been peasants in their mundane time !

Down there, down there, in the far vine-clad plain with its Frankish memories, the plain of Alsace, where Guttenberg discovered his *prelum* in the wine-press, among the villages with their roman-*esque* archways and fountains, their ancient steep-roofed houses and yokes of plump somnolent cream-coloured oxen, the dreaded Prussian, who ate queer food and had such underbred manners, would soon set his heavy-booted foot !

Well, I have run on inordinately, but it is a digression for his eye, if he can see it ! And since I am launched upon a sea of egoism, I will continue his letter.

“Forgive this trifling: seriously I am very pleased. Also with the prospects of the ‘Doric Moods.’ I will still maintain that they owe their good reception entirely to their merits and no whit to diplomacy of Johnson’s or Le Gallienne. Our book is due for the 15th of this month. They have just sent us a suggested design for the cover—a tragic and comic mask with liberty to substitute what we like—within 5 days !! Of course in the time one can do nothing: otherwise perhaps Horne or Ricketts might have been requisitioned.”

Later Ernest Dowson writes to “Cher Vieux,” always with his accustomed modesty:

“*The Comedy of Masks* appears on Friday—nominally—but I see no reason now why it should

be actually any further delayed. You must command it from Mudie's. I tremble at the prospect of being reviewed—I am painfully conscious of the innumerable blemishes and alas! the weakest points are in the first volume so that I fear sleep will overcome the reviewer before he reach any of our less banal passages. What fools we are to write—or rather to publish! Mercifully Lionel does not review novels, and as to the opinion of the average novel-reviewing —ish animal—we will not think of it.

“Peters has turned up in town again very redolent of the States and very enthusiastic over the Highlands.

“How shall you call *la petite*? This will be an exercise almost as difficult as the choice of a book title. *En passant* can you suggest a name for *notre prochain roman*, which is just half completed. ‘A Misalliance’ is, I fear, bad English. ‘The Opportunist’ occurs to me, also ‘The Interlopers,’ but none of these is good. It’s better than ‘Masks’ we both think, but vindictive, savage, spleenful, libellous almost, to the last degree. Heaven knows when it will be finished.”

We called “*la petite*” Marion among other *prénoms*, though she has grown up to womanhood a *Mansueta*, that name which the dear poet wished her to bear.

It is strange that the remarkable and burnished

novels of Ernest Dowson and Mr Arthur Moore have been spoken of less than some of the former author's writings. Ernest Dowson, indeed, began to be spoken of at an early date. His first short story in prose, reprinted with others in "Dilemmas" (Elkin Mathews, 1895, 1912 and 1913), appeared in *Temple Bar* in 1888 under the title "Souvenirs of an Egoist." The novels apart, he never, indeed, suffered from that unmerited neglect which is the portion of so many. To me part of the tragedy of his life was this—that fame or notoriety, which you will—warred against his essential self. As a fresh boy he charmed. Then came nascent literary celebrity in *The Savoy* and elsewhere, and he rocked at its approach. That, as Mr Edgar Jepson was able to observe, he was the true Ernest Dowson to the end, proves that breed conquered environment. The dog of race hunts according to his traditions, says the French adage.

He writes at about this time of being engaged every evening in a week, which proves that he was living a happy life and that certain troubles of the spirit oppressed him not too heavily.

"The *Comedy* is out at last—very charming in its outward, visible aspect, and for the rest I hope no one will discover as many inward blemishes as I can. I am anxious to see the Infanta—her names are all pretty. Has she begun to show any literary tendencies yet?"

He wrote in early winter :

“ Will you see the November *Bookman* ? . . . they have made quite a creditable article of our meagre biographies, although it is news to me that I have been ‘ steadily making my way in literature.’ There is also a good review in it of *Masks* . . . Is the Infanta short petticoated yet ? Or when does that interesting development take place ? I went down to see Marmie play at Wimbledon the other day. He was an excellent Ralph Nickleby in a tedious play.”

Poor Dowson was no Dickensian, until the time of his death, when, as Mr Sherard has put on record, he began to read the master with all the rapture of a literary discoverer.

“ I have seen no one much except the Temple folk lately and Sherard who camped out here one night after a peregrination with me in the East End during which, I am sorry to say, I contracted a frantic cold which is still harassing me. . . . Shall you be *aux* Rhymers to-morrow ? ”

Apropos of his East End ramble with Mr Sherard he told me that one night he had gone out for a stroll from his dock-house, and had been almost at once knocked down. He awoke from insensibility after some time, and found that he had been robbed of his money—a very small sum.

The thief must have felt like Rivarol's burglar; who, breaking into Rivarol's *escritoire*, was addressed by the wit with an "*Ah ça, mon ami!* How often have I looked in there to no purpose on the chance of finding a stray *louis d'or!*"

Writing on 20th December 1893, he mentions a meeting with Mr Edgar Jepson, the novelist, at a small Rhymers' Club gathering. "Him I was delighted to see again although I did not recognise him, nor he me." Dowson thought the other a good deal changed by his sojourn in the West Indies, and speaks, in the letter, of his own coming "exile in Chalons-sur-Saone or Saumur-sur-Oise." He was probably then meditating a language mastership abroad.

He discusses various literary matters in other notes, as when he mentions a Verlaine lecture promoted by Mr Herbert Horne. The tickets were five shillings each, and he says:

"I really think nous autres, Rimeurs, should have been put on the 'Free List.' I had a charming evening at the Odd Volumes last night. I sat opposite Todhunter, who had three Irish guests (Rolleston, Percival Graves and Standish O'Grady, a charming Celt). My Lord Mayor came with a gorgeous creature to wait on him. . . . There was no one else there whom I knew except—by sight only—York Powell."

These are manifestly the phrases of a man interested in existence—not yet an invalid.

THE LETTERS

IV

IN the spring of 1894, in an amusing letter excusing himself for having intruded upon us with Mr Jepson when we were entertaining a friend against whom I had warned him as not being sympathetic with poets, he speaks of retiring to Mr Hillier's "cottage in the wood," for Easter with "La Terre" in order to put in twenty pages a day of translation to make up arrears. Just then the absolutely literal rendering into English of Zola's humorous libel on the French peasant was engaging him daily. He found the task most irksome, and he discussed it with me from time to time, finally deciding to render certain Rabelaisian phrases into something less offensive in English—into common cleanly blasphemies at least. Six of us were engaged with him in translating the best known of Zola's novels, and like hooked fish we struggled desperately to escape the ultra-literal in places, but like a cool trout-fisher Mr Teixeira de Mattos, our brilliant chief, held us up rigorously round the editorial boat, never once allowing one of us to dart off into the depths of British decency for which we longed. We had the fearful example

of Mr Vizetelly before our eyes. He had been prosecuted some years earlier for his translations of "Nana" and one or two others of Zola's novels, but we were enrolled as a learned group, "The Lutetian Society," and we were writing for scholars, and were protected by our manifest sincerity and by prohibitive prices.

Our books as remainders drifted off finally to the States, where to my horror "Nana" reappears as a huge and, I am told, lavishly illustrated production in "The Millionaires' Library," or some such edition. The poor translator gets nothing by this vast act of appropriation save annoyance and nightmare. America, of course, is the honestest of countries. Was it not there that George Washington "never told a lie"? Well, well! I wonder if "La Terre" has kept "Nana" company.

Dowson writes in April :

"CHER VIEUX,—Wie gehts? I have been so overwhelmed with Zola, and also disorganised by the sudden death of my housekeeper, and thrilled by other things, that I have deferred all writing. But I have wondered how it fared with you and when we should meet. I have not done more than 340 pages. . . . Would you make my excuses to your mother for not having answered her note, and thank her for the symbolical stones according to the Polish tradition. I am intensely interested in every kind of that symbolism. . . . I suppose

you are rurally at your ease now, so far as it is possible to be at your ease and translate Zola. I have seen hardly anyone but Jepson, who dines with me almost daily, and I fancy derives a good deal of satisfaction from studying my transparently imbecile condition. It is a great thing that so delightful a person should at last have seen the absurdity of living in Barbadoes. Are you going to the Yellow Book dinner? I shall, I expect, but I feel that I ought to go to no dinners until this pyramid is pulled down. I have had and returned my Rhymers' proofs. They have chucked my Lady's Hands, and my Terre Promise, in favour of two verses which I like less. Mine will be a very poor show. I hope they will bind the book decently this time. Are you by the way an astrologer? I begin to think that in my horoscope the first fortnight in April must be bound up with my fortunes very closely, critically or fatally, or perilously. Let me hear from you! Are you at Blackheath next Sunday? But even if you were, the chances are against my being able to leave my corvée. These be parlous times. . . . How do you like the appended? "

Then, like a rare flower springing suddenly and unexpectedly in some familiar coign of garden, appears the MS. of his lovely poem: "Quid non speremus, amantes?" It has been printed on page 55 of his "Verses" (1896), and is dedicated to Mr Arthur Moore. In the letter it

is dated 9th April 1894, for he dated his poems, in most cases, and, for his friends, wrote them out meticulously as they afterwards appeared in print.

“ As man aspires and falls, yet a soul springs
Out of the agony of flesh, at last ;
So love, that flesh enthralls, shall rise on wings
Soul-centred when the rule of flesh is passed.”

I am no astrologer, and could not then have foretold my friend's death, so full was he of interest in life. He died—not in April—but on 21st February 1900, refusing, as it were, to live beyond the decade which has been somewhat arbitrarily assigned to him. But there is a pathos in this early reference to a month being bound up “ critically or fatally ” with his fortunes.

Of his work as a translator much has been written. It was forced work—not his best. His “ Terre,” for instance, is ‘pot-boiler’ achievement. Nor do I care for other pieces, such as “ The Girl with the Golden Eyes,” which reappears now and then in booksellers’ windows—Balzac wrote the original as a pot-boiler—together with Dowson MSS., valued at a guinea apiece. What a supreme mockery! During both their lives, latterly, the late Mr Leonard Smithers is said to have paid the poet thirty shillings a week for all the work he could do for him, including a large amount of *corvée* translation. When, if ever, the Judgment Books are unrolled, it is not the East End sweated women who will have the first say, but rather the

x plagiarised and pirated authors, the translators, the poor scholars, in the leash of the illiterate and the vulgar ! What an army they will form !

Late in the summer of 1894 we were at Sandgate in Kent, and there the poet, accompanied by an accomplished editor, visited us from Saturday to Monday. We bathed in the sea, and, there being a great run on the bathing-machines, were forced to occupy one conjointly. Dear old Ernest Dowson was no hero in the water, and I retain a distinct recollection of his clinging to the wheel of the machine, while the chopping waves broke over him, and he kept his head up pathetically, well out of their reach. A wind blew that hot morning, and re-entering our narrow dressing-room before the others had done bathing, I was surprised by a great grey fluttering of scapularies on every vantage point of the hanging garments ! I was reminded of this, of late years, in the crypt of that old chapel at Warwick where generations of the famous local noble line lie stacked on shelves, coffined amid much greyness and many cobwebby flappings. Sir Walter Scott, by the by, urged his son's wife to visit the Warwick chapel, but did he think of the crypt ?

In the afternoon the poet was so much himself that we actually "walked on the Leas" at Folkestone among the conventional throng. I remember he knew all about a professionial beauty there promenading with a stockbroker. It was more than I did.

THE CRISIS

So far my friend had been happy enough, and though, of late months, his week-end visits to us had been becoming fewer—for I remember that the imagined intrusion with Mr Jepson marked a rather rare occasion—our intercourse had been kept up fairly well. But, in the latter months of 1894, and throughout 1895, troubles and tragedies began to accumulate, though in the absence of notes and documents I am now not too sure of dates.

Pathologically speaking, my poor friend was doomed to die of phthisis. That disease runs a course of some six years. He died in 1900, and already in 1894 it seemed to have got him in its clutches. His nervousness in the sea may have been due to ill health, and we have more than once read of his very severe colds, which he shook off with difficulty. He had never taken much care of himself. The uncomfortable nights on sofas, the unwise and innutritious dinners he ate, his fondness for fantastic vigils—all these were contributory causes of his final malady. As to vigils, I remember introducing him to Lionel Johnson, when the latter first came to town. They sat up in my rooms till a late hour, and then, entranced with

one another's conversation, went off to Johnson's chambers, where they sat up all night. Again, on a visit with him to Cambridge, he insisted on keeping an all-night vigil in Mr Sayle's garden. I heard my friends' voices till the small hours, when I fell asleep. And now Mr Arthur Moore tells me that when they first met, at Queen's College, Oxford, in 1886 or 1887, they too watched the whole night out.

But there were psychological causes, too. His father and mother, restlessly wandering from home to home, ended by taking up their abode at Lea, in Kent, where the poet had been born. He used to walk over Blackheath to see us. On one occasion I remember seeing his mother saying good-bye to him and flitting away, a shadowy figure, near a little grove of trees that fronted our house. She would not visit her son's friends—there was evidently trouble in the air.

Of the sudden deaths of the poet's father and mother I am expressly forbidden to write, and can only state here that the one shock following at no long interval of time upon the other shook him to the roots of his being.

I trust I am guilty of no indiscretion when I say that the old dock had latterly been a great source of trouble. The poet told me of a mortgage, for no very great amount, it is true, and of the foreman being the looming creditor, who could only have been paid off if prosperity had returned to the Thames after the dock strikes.

I never could discover how Ernest Dowson settled with this man after his father's death. I have an idea that, growing utterly sick of his business troubles, he simply shut the dockyard gate behind him, and, like Tolstoy, sought by this simple process to disembarrass himself of real estate, cobwebbed over by deeds and liabilities. His affairs remain a mystery to this day, though I am told he need never for a moment have been in need of funds. The dock, as Mr Arthur Moore tells me, was certainly sold, in 1898 perhaps.

Other troubles fell upon him. His bright young brother, so he told me, then grown almost to man's estate, met with failure in Canada—the fate of so many gentlemen's sons. He walked huge distances—met with numberless adventures. And now his cousin, Mr Gerald Hoole, writing from the Isle of Skye in February, 1914, has informed me that Rowland died of phthisis in America now more than a year ago. The hereditary complaint has thus taken both brothers, and a whole lovable family is swept away into the world of memories.

And then the love affair! We will cut a long story short by saying simply—it failed.

Consumption induces the feverish *spes phthisica* of the old physicians: it heightens the appetites that prey upon the wasted body. The elder Mr Dowson, who had the story from Severn, told me that this was so in the case of Keats.

I am not “out” to detract from Ernest Dowson,

but to defend. If, later on, he erred, he did so under an accumulation of griefs worthy of the old Greek tragedies. In small families strokes of Fate fall heavily even on the Philistine, but when they rain on the frail, the exquisitely feeling, the imaginative, the very loving, and the unstable, they crush.

The beginning of the days of confirmed ill health and prolonged mental suffering is perhaps indicated in a phrase which occurs in a note dated from 6 Featherstone Buildings, High Holborn. This apparently was the first station in the poet's *via dolorosa* by way of Paris and Brittany to the last phase at Catford under Mr Sherard's roof. He chose Featherstone Buildings, I believe, because of poor Chatterton's supposed residence¹ there long ago. He writes of his "abominable procrastination," and says:

"My excuse for not having come to you on the Sunday I daresay you will find equally inexcusable but it was simply because I was in such a state of nervous and physical disability that I had not the faintest recollection of having any engagement. . . . I expect to be in this country, much as it tortures and maddens me, till Christmas or the New Year."

That New Year must have been the first day of 1896. "E. D. went to Paris," writes Mr Arthur Moore (3rd February 1914), "with Norreys Connell

¹ Chatterton died in Brooke Street, Holborn.

in December 1895. . . . It was very near the time of Verlaine's death," which occurred on 8th January 1896. The two authors lived for a time at No. 214 Rue St Jacques. Early in 1896 Ernest Dowson went to Pont-Aven and stayed for some months, Mr Moore joining him for a fortnight in August. Of the poet's life in Brittany I give some account in the following chapter.

It should be mentioned here that he was in Dieppe in the summer of 1895, and that, though troubles had rendered him silent as a correspondent, he was still able to live among civilised people, of whom many, including the late Mr Conder, and several artists and their wives, and others, were then in the ancient town. Mr Arthur Moore visited him, and saw him again when he removed to Arques, the quaint village near the prim forest of that name, and the old romantic chateau.

DOWSON IN BRITTANY

"I THINK he was happiest in the remote Breton villages,¹ whither he now and again withdrew himself, from which he wrote his most delightful letters. They used to give me the impression that the world went well with him there—as well, at any rate, as it ever could go with him."

So wrote Mr Edgar Jepson in his just account of "The Real Ernest Dowson," published, as I have mentioned before, in *The Academy*, in November 1907.

Brittany was to Ernest Dowson what Ireland was to Lionel Johnson. Both poets found in those dilapidated delightful countries what cities and orderly champaigns do not supply to the spirit of the timid, the imaginative and, in Johnson's case, the retrospective and religious.

"BRIDGE DOCK, LIMEHOUSE, E.

"June 13/92.

"C. DOWSON AND SON.

"*Telegraphic Address*:

"DOWSON, LIMEHOUSE.

"MON CHER VICTOR,—I hope you will consider the Breton journey seriously: Moore, I am sure, would be very charmed. In case you decide upon

¹ The poet knew Brittany well. He went a walking tour there in the summer of 1890 with Mr A. C. Hillier, to whom I introduced him.

it I send you a sort of itinerary which you may find useful, although you will very likely vary it."

There follows the clearest possible plan of a tour right round "old black Brittany," which we adhered to religiously on our wedding journey and greatly enjoyed.

Dowson had never visited Carnac, and, in a kind of blind obedience to him, we missed that great druidic relic, but we went to Scaër, which he had perhaps not visited either, and, under the guidance of old M. Yves Rodallec, Flaubert's host, saw the wonderful three-days "*Pardon*," with its wrestling, gavotte-dancing, and incomparable costumes from many villages. I have never seen such costumes, even in Alsace, and am told that they are not discarded yet. But since my informants did not know the country in 1892, I cannot rightly estimate the value of their evidence. Certain it is that the Picards have abandoned what costume they had in 1883, when, at Ault, on the coast, the little girls appeared at mass in a garb exquisite in its old-world simplicity.

" Through deepening dusk one just can see
The little white-capped heads that move
In time to lines turned rhythmically
And starred with names of love."

In 1897 the little "lint-haired girls" wore wretched sailor hats, shabby frocks, and looked for all the world like our own Board School children.

How strange it is that the populace in its ascent sheds off its hereditary graces as so many marks of bondage! In England, and still more in the land of Mrs Wiggs's cabbage-patch, Demos has made itself unutterably ugly. The disastrous little cricketing cap worn by our old cottage wives is an approximation to costume, for it is likely to become stereotyped, but how compare it with the many-shaped and wonderfully laundered *coiffes* of the Breton women? They are best, I think, at Dol, but admirable everywhere. In Scotland, the quaint old men's "bonnets" have given way to the odious and all-pervading "cloth cap." The "bowler" reigns in Italy. In Alsace, however, you still see the fine old noble dress, the huge archaic bows, black in token of a long mourning. A year ago, in September 1913, when I came down from the top of the cathedral, where I had been sitting three hundred feet up, among the little late Gothic figures of a shouting bear, a praying lady and a burgher, all gazing upwards to the aerial summit with its cross, there met my gaze a group of stolid little peasant girls, thick-booted, darkly dressed, holding in sunburnt hands huge disproportionate umbrellas, with, on top of all, the vast august black bows of the *Alsacienne*. They stood against the fretted red-sandstone wall, waiting, grave-eyed, for their friends to join them before going afoot into the long flat stretches of the *Plaine*, among the maize crops, the vineyards and the tobacco fields. Peasants are Mediæval people;

they choose immemorial places of rendezvous. They either have no watches or their watches, of a turnip pattern, do not go. So, doubtless, these damsels had been told to meet their friends, vaguely, towards the setting of the sun. It mattered not that they were at the trysting-place hours too early. They were, I fancy, of the kindred of him who went into a bookseller's shop and cried :

" I want the book ! "

" What book, sir ? "

" That sort of a little yellow book ! "

This is not so much a digression as an attempt to set forth the spirit of peasantry, which is the same in many countries, from the land of Tolstoi or Kipling's India to Connemara. The cowboys lack that spirit, by the by. " The Virginian " is not of this ancient kindred. Into the old peasant spirit Dowson entirely entered in the Brittany he loved so well.

" *Mon cher*," I can hear him saying, " that is the tapestry that escapes me and that I never weave ! "

" It is nothing wonderfull," one might have made reply years ago, " but you and I see differently. You are static : your figures and loves are of all ages. You, in one sense, belong to the age of Tibullus, Catullus, and the rest of the classics. Others are little unconsidered romanticists of the school of Longfellow. You, *en philosophe*, suffer from the sorrows of the world :

others, apart from family memories, would be half consoled, on their death-beds, by, say, the tune of a bag-pipe, or the sight of a corn-hopper from Alsace, parti-coloured and semi-Oriental in execution and design, or the memory of dancing *Algériennes*, or of quaint childish Bavarian women, dancing, too, in a mediæval *contre-danse*, or even of screeching Anamites in the Paris *Exposition* of 1889."

He would have mused, pouted out his lips, lit another appalling Vevey. But, in his demeanour, there would have been that sympathy which, in these latter years, we miss—increasingly.

His letter continues: "I hope once more that you will think of it: I am sure that you would both of you be charmed with the country. The formal *table d'hôte* of Trouville, Cannes, Paris, Dinan, etc., is unknown. . . . I have a neuralgic disorder which swells my face abominably, so that unless there is a speedy improvement you will find me at home in the evening soon. *À bientôt donc.*"

In July, 1892, he wrote:

"CARO VITTORIO MIO,—I have only just realised that you are finally departed. . . . And is one ever to see you again? At any rate let me hear from you speedily, and of your plans. I go to Brittany a week later than was arranged. . . . so there is all the more chance of our meeting. We shall not be more than a week at Le Faouet,

whence we proceed into quite unexplored barbarisms to the extreme west of Finisterre: but we ought to run across each other, when we are returning. I wish I was going under your circumstances. However I must possess my soul in patience. . . .

“*P.S.*—Even if we happen to miss in Brétagne, you *must* visit Faouet: on the left-hand side of the market-place (looking East) from the Lion d’Or observe the house which, whatever happen, I intend to live in.”

“AU LION D’OR, LE FAOUE.

“*Minuit, Wednesday (in August, 1892).*

“CARISSIME,—I am charmed to hear that you are in the sacred land. I also adore the granite and the cathedral of Dol. Alas! that we are just leaving for that direction. We hoped that you would arrive here before we left, but now you are not, and at 4.0 in the morning we depart for Pontivy, en route for Lamballe, etc. . . . I leave this note on the chance of your reaching here before we meet; but I hope that either at Lamballe or Dol we may rencontrer. . . . If you come here let me entreat you to take a rough but most delightful walk up the hill opposite St Barbe. When you have seen the savage beauty of the view you get at about the end of the range, I hope you will be as devout a Faouettois as I am. No more now: we have but 3 hours’ slumber.

.

“ Alas I shall be in London this day week. But I shall return and live here. Some day you must do likewise.

“ If you have time to send your impressions of this place to me, your letter will be to me even as the saving draught of water to the traveller in a thirsty land ! ”

We “ missed ” in Brittany, though we reached Le Faouet eventually after a memorable journey in a *voiture*, as the little *diligence* of those parts is still called. Le Faouet (“ the beech-tree ”) is famous for its memories of the Chouans, who rang their tocsin, calling the faithful to arms, in the little hill-top belfry of Sainte Barbe. It has been painted in a well-known picture. The guests of the Lion d’Or were full of the recently flown visitors, and the little Bretonne, who waited on us in her stiff mediæval *jupe* and *coiffe*, constantly quoted Monsieur “ Douzeuc,” the Armorican word for “ twelve,” which was the nearest shot she could make at “ Dowson.”

We heard many old stories of Chouans and wolves, and eventually, travelling on through Scaër and Carhaix, were one afternoon scurrying along interminable roads to Morlaix, in a pre-historic *voiture*, when we stopped to refresh our driver with potato spirit in a roadside farmhouse. The man who served us was a grim old long-haired Breton, and he had ancient flint-lock guns on his walls, which looked as if they had done service in

the cause of *Chouannerie*. The floor of his large kitchen and living-room was of beaten earth, but he possessed fine old furniture, and on the top of a cupboard-bedstead reclined, in full local costume, *coiffe* and all, a sick woman. She seemed in great pain and was very pale and restless, but not much notice was taken of her.

“*Oui, elle est malade,*” the others said. Seeing us, however, she reared up on her elbow—the whole thing was very grim—and joined in the conversation.

Strange that *Monsieur et Madame* were the *second* batch of English people that they had seen in their lives, and that the others had appeared only about ten days before! These others had been two Englishmen, travelling in an opposite direction to ours—*très pressés, à ce qui paraît*.

Owing to my liberality in the matter of potato spirit, I was the *grand seigneur* of the occasion. I, therefore, cross-examined the poor invalid carefully.

What were the travellers like? But yes, one was “*carré*,” or was the word “*trappu*”? Mr Arthur Moore, whom his friends know as a well set-up man, will forgive my quotation of this poor invalid. Peasants have an extraordinary knack of offending, without in the least meaning to do so. They are always very grave, literal, and interested in what they report.

The other traveller—gentlemen they manifestly

were not, for they were afoot—" *était plus chétif.*"

We fancied we had spotted the travellers at once, and subsequently verified our guess.

Would that this could have happened some years later, and that it could have been my last news of my friend ! I should like to think of him always as travelling off into infinity in a land of primitives. At the time of this little episode, I remember thinking of the Esquimaux, who told the Franklin search-party that, some winters ago, they had seen white men travelling by in a long line, apparently hungry.

" And why did not you feed them ? "

" Because we had nothing to eat ourselves."

Once again I heard from him at the same address, and then it was his last letter to me, which, at the time I received it, struck me as lacking in the customary cordiality. But it is as kind as ever, though melancholy and valedictory. With the exception of one post-card, written in February, I had not heard from him for an age.

" MON CHER VIEUX [he had then written from the Hotel Gloanec, at Pont-Aven],—Many months have I meant to write to you and give you of my wandering news. But arriving here, after passing through these Breton lands, which are so associated with you, makes it incumbent on me to send at least a post-card. I will follow it up with

a letter when I am settled down, but write to me in the meantime. I shall stay here at least a month. I wish you could come too and leave your fogs to bask in baking sunshine as I did this afternoon, taking my coffee in an arbour in a garden of my hotel at Quimperlé. I feel I shall do much work here: it is an adorable place and, much as I love Paris, where I have lived now some time, I felt rested and restored to some prospect of reasonable health directly I came here. Write and believe me in spite of all my short-comings as a correspondent, always yours."

As one who dreads the slipping out of sight of a friendship as greatly as he dreads the death of a friend, I wrote at once, and tried to revive the pleasant old exchanges of letters, but the sun had ceased to shine for poor Ernest Dowson, and with a note of pain came the final letter in May, 1896. It was a shock, almost a blow, however kindly and calm its phrases.

"MY DEAR VICTOR,—I am ashamed of myself for not having long ago answered your charming letter, from Pont-Aven, but constant ill health and depression of spirits have made me a sorry correspondent. At least, I will not go away from this place, with which we both have had pleasant associations, without putting myself in touch with you. You will remember the room (*salle à manger*) in which I am writing. This visit of mine has not been a success; I came up from Pont-Aven only

two days ago, to see if the change of air—from Pont-Aven to Faouet is really an enormous change, though it may sound ridiculous to you—would do me any good, and to spend a fortnight. But the ineffable *tristesse* of the place is too much for me and I am returning to what is more or less my permanent home and address (Hotel Gloanec, Pont-Aven, Finistère) to-morrow. Faouet is charming in the daytime. One can work without interruption, and, tired of work, one can bask in the blazing sunshine by Sainte-Barbe. But the evenings, the cold, bleak desolation of the evenings! Perhaps Pont-Aven, where I know everybody, and have many friends, French, English and Breton, has spoilt me; perhaps Le Faouet has changed, more likely I have. But I have not the courage to stay here by myself. It is more beautiful, however, now than in the full summer. There is no one in either hotel. Our old friend Jeanne has retired and Madame Mitouard (who asks to be remembered to you) is shaky on her pins. Marie-Joseph has gone to Paris. Miss or Meese Rose, who spoke English, is post-mistress or tobacconist at Vannes. The two little twins, whom Moore and I admired much at the *billiard*, are grown into ugly and farouches girls of twelve. And the two trees, whom (? which) Moore christened the ‘Sisters Limejuice,’ are cut down. Eheu fugaces! But it is probably I, who have changed, more than Faouet, and doubtless if I was here with you and Moore I should love the place again. But in

my sick and sorry old age I begin to be dependent on society : so I am off to Pont-Aven *après demain*, and there I hope you will write to me.

“ I hope you and yours prosper. It is long since I have heard news of you. My poems will be out in a day or two—perhaps are out now. You must forgive the freedom I have taken with yours and your wife’s name in my inscription to my poem on Marion. I am full up with work of various kinds and I suppose I ought to be satisfied with myself, for it is all work that pays. But as I have no lungs left to speak of, an apology for a liver, and a broken heart I may be permitted to rail a little sometimes.

“ Write to me soon, mon Vieux. I shall be at Pont-Aven for two or three months and winter probably in Paris. Smith, Smithers and Moore are my only regular correspondents. Johnson sends me messages, with promises of speedy letters, but has not written as yet since I started on my wanderings. With J— I have seriously quarrelled ; and I am afraid H— is annoyed with me because I have published my verses out of the series. — writes to me fairly often, *friendly* letters, which give me sleepless nights and cause me to shed morbid and puerile tears. But she is very kind. With all remembrances to all, affectionately yours,

“ (*Signed*) ERNEST DOWSON.”

It was scarcely my fault that he had not heard

from me. I had fancied that my long and urgent letter of February must have bored him. Silence is often a poignant rebuff to a man schooled during years of youth in the endurance of neglect or the reception of snubs, merited sometimes, oftener imaginary, painful always! Moreover, I had not known where to write to him. To us he had been becoming a mystery. Art had been engulfing him, and Art is an even subtler estranger than faddishness, its modern substitute.

THE LAST PHASE

HIS book came out. It made his name as a poet. It is mentioned next to mine—we are described as Rhymers, and I am proud of the juxtaposition—in Mr Ernest Rhys's "Literary Causerie," prefixed to the "Literary Year-Book" of 1897.

This first volume of "Verses"—how diffident the title!—contains all that is finest in his scanty poetic output. "Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae"¹ rearrested the attention at once. It has been rightly called of late "the poem of the Decadence." [It dates from 1891: I have no manuscript of it, as I mentioned before. Had it been written after his troubles had begun to thicken, it would have been a wonderful achievement—a swan-song.] In the same volume, the cover of which is adorned by a curve from the pencil of Aubrey Beardsley, himself then falling on evil days—a curve which Ernest Dowson spoke

¹ Hor. *Carm.* Lib. IV. i. 3-4. Although in school days I learnt the "Odes of Horace" by heart three times, I am indebted to that good scholar, my old friend, Mr Osman Edwards, for the identification of Cinara. Mr Edwards met Ernest Dowson at Oxford, but only remembers him as "a very quiet man."

of with great pride—appear all the old familiar favourite poems—"Supreme Unction," "Amor Umbratilis," "To One in Bedlam."

His second book of verse was published by Leonard Smithers & Co., in 1899, and to me it marks an extreme falling-away in the poet's powers. It is full of lassitude and sorrowfulness, as of a man who has done with the world and is dying disillusionised. There are three prose poems at the end of all, a reminiscence of the admired prose poems of Baudelaire. The second of them, "The Visit," cannot be read without a certain shudder, for we feel, as we read it, that the so sensitive poet is approaching death.

"Then dared I open my eyes and I saw my old body on the bed, and the room in which I had grown so tired, and in the middle of the room the pan of charcoal which still smouldered. And dimly I remembered my great weariness and the lost whiteness of Lalage and last year's snows; and these things had been agonies."

I imagine that I saw Ernest Dowson only twice again. Once he passed me on the London pavement. He was, it seems, coming out of the staircase to Smithers's flat in Arundel Street. So ill and absent-minded, so pale and, to me, forbidding did he look, that I could not summon up courage to address him. *Cui bono?* Of course I am quite wrong, but we all know this state of feeling. It is useless to accuse me of being of the irritable genus. I am not unduly morbid, and who does not

know what it is to slacken pace behind someone who has failed in cordiality towards one and has seemed bored by one's advances and reminders? I had no idea that Ernest Dowson was then in London or how long he would stay. He had received a facial injury, easily remediable, which may have partly accounted for his unwillingness to revisit old and faithful friends. He was musing as usual, and seemed to see nothing, his eyes almost bulging from his head. He was wrapped in a heavy coat and had a larger cigar than of old in his mouth. I forgot the incident, which pained me at the time, as such things do.

However, in July, 1897, he called on us, dined and stayed the night. Hardly a word could be drawn from him. He seemed frozen to stone. It was dreadful. As a family we were longing for sympathy, for congratulations. We had a charming new house; our little child was at the pretty age of five; I had been appointed to my life's work.

He nodded wearily in reply to every question. He would tell me nothing of himself. I have no sort of recollection of how we got through that evening. Did he go out—did he stay at home? I forget.

Next morning I left him in my book-room. I was going for the first time, if I remember rightly, to visit my official Library as Librarian elect. It was an exciting occasion. Would he come too? Oh no! He waved the subject aside as though he were an Indian General repressing the family poet. I left him among my

old books, of which he used to be so fond. At about four o'clock I returned. He had smoked innumerable cigarettes: they lay all around him in saucers and trays. And with dreaming eyes he was viewing my little child, who stood in front of him and seemed puzzled by his demeanour. He appeared to be looking through her, while she gazed at him. It was the child whose birth he had hymned.

Very shortly afterwards, he arose briskly enough, borrowed a new suit of clothes, of which I rarely possess an exemplar, and announced curtly that he was going yachting off the coast of Ireland. I congratulated him on his fashionable occupation. He never smiled, seemed to be painfully repressing something—he had seemed ill at ease and in a state of self-repression throughout his visit—shook hands briefly, in a most matter-of-fact way, left no exact indication of his future whereabouts, was gone!

A friend tells me that he was subject to these moods. I at least had not observed them so far. We never saw him again—never again heard directly from him. Once, it might have been in 1898, Lionel Johnson, himself then entering his mythic phase, for he shortly afterwards shut himself up in seclusion in his chambers and grew a long black beard, which I alone among men ¹

¹ His charwoman, since discovered, denies that the beard was long, and refers pathetically to his perfect manners.

seem to have beheld—Lionel Johnson mentioned to me that he had been meeting Ernest Dowson in London and that the wandering poet had said: "I have it on my conscience that I have not seen the Plarrs." This was a little balm to a sore heart. Did he still suffer from his somewhat comic disfigurement? I had not noticed it in July, 1897. Had he been annoyed by our slight gleam of prosperity? Surely not. For, though he disliked Kensingtonians, it was the spiritual rather than the local type that was not dear to him. Was he ill? He had not appeared so at the time of his visit, and had vouchsafed no reply to questions concerning his health. He had been impenetrable—a stone.

Myths began to cluster round him. But of this we are sure: Adelaide, the "Missie" of one of his dedications, was married late in September, 1897. We need only record the fact with Tacitean brevity. Mr Moore went to the wedding at his earnest request, carrying the poet's present.

Sunt lacrimae rerum!

Later on, Mr Guy Thorne, who knew him very well in his last period, heard him say in answer to the careless query: "Ernest, were you ever in love?" "*Vous me demandez si j'ai aimé; oui! c'est une histoire singulière et terrible!*" The words were Voltaire's.

"While I live," continues the writer in an account of "The Strand of Twenty Years Ago," published in *T.P.'s Weekly* in July, 1913, "I shall never forget

his wan smile, the haunted look in the poor fellow's eyes."¹

He spent much time in Paris ; he was certainly there in 1899 when "Adrian Rome" was published by Messrs Methuen & Co. I am informed that a kind of rescue party was sent out to bring him news of funds lying at his disposal in the hands of his father's executors. He fancied himself at feud with them—his relations. His would-be rescuer found him lying in bed all day, and dining, as he was perversely fond of doing, at a wretched little *gargotte*. He was induced by his old friend to dine more handsomely. His chief admiration and associate seems, according to this informant, to have been the eccentric "Bibi la Purée," a kind of tramp of literature, who had a mania for stealing the umbrellas of celebrities. If this be more than myth, it is characteristic of my old fellow-commentator. He had, poor fellow, apparently sunk into an extreme condition of self-neglect. He carried his *misère* to Dieppe in the summer of 1899.

It is strange to think of him as perhaps once more at the romantic Chateau d'Arques, among whose ruins and in whose ancient forest he may have wandered when he stayed at Arques in 1895. It was his last summer now. At Arques they show you the skeleton of a lady who had been immured

¹ If Mr Guy Thorne refers to the period of 1893 in this and a later passage, it is curious to reflect that Dowson had already passed into his last phase in some circles.

in the thick wall in some dark forgotten age. At the bony feet lies the skeleton of a little dog. Which of them had died first? What had been their offence? Did the poet, penned in by stony destiny and drawing near his end, see them, too, and what were his thoughts?

These weird relics were shown me two years ago, when out in the country for the first time after a summer of illness and a drastic operation. I was rejoicing in the autumn sunlight, and had I known that this was where my friend perhaps last wandered, how furiously I should have been given to think!

A story of his going a long expedition in the Netherlands and elsewhere with Mr Norreys Connell, another of his inhabiting a London flat in the absence of a friend and decorating it with herring-bones, and another of his enjoying a short period of sartorial rehabilitation which lasted about a fortnight—these may belong to this or an earlier period.

After Dieppe he probably came to London. He stayed for long in the Euston Road and there Mr Robert Harborough Sherard found him.

To the last London period, perhaps, belongs Mr Guy Thorne's description of him as flitting about, seemingly a lost creature, "a youthful ghost strayed amongst the haunts of men. . . . Pale, emaciated, in clothes that were almost ragged, poor Ernest flittered [about] in search of someone with whom to talk. When he found a

friend, his face would light up with a singular and penetrating sweetness that made one forget an untidiness—to use no other word—that verged upon offence.”

Side by side with this passage I should like here to quote Mr Edgar Jepson’s appreciation :

“ Ernest Dowson was a dreamer with the finest and most delicate sense of beauty. He was an exile in this world ; and very wisely he lived aloof, as far as it would let him, in the beautiful world of his dreams, which he has now without doubt inherited. Of externals he was utterly heedless. He did not love the sordid at all ; but he did pay as much attention to his appearance as that stern Englishman, Dr Johnson. He was simply not concerned with the world ; and I think that his wonderful, gentle charm came from this attitude to life. He never cared enough for this world to pose before it ; he had the charm of perfect simplicity and sincerity, the charm of an extraordinary gentleness. He was always just Ernest Dowson ; and it was a delightful person to be.”

The friend who had gone to rescue the poet in Paris met him for the last time in London. He was ill and coughing, and was invited to dine at a good restaurant, which was named.

“ I cannot face a dinner at ——’s,” said the poet despairingly.

Our impressions of others are coloured by our

own personalities, and I thank Mr Arthur Moore for thus always remembering our friend in other than lurid lights. He told me (13th January 1914) that the last time he saw Ernest Dowson was about two months before his death. Like myself he had received very few letters from him after 1895. Ernest was then lodging in the Euston Road. Though coughing a good deal, he did not seem exceptionally ill, for "dilapidated" he had always seemed, as his friends well knew. Yet it was the last phase, of which we were mostly entirely unaware.

Years for us had passed after that summer day in 1897. We, indeed, heard scarcely a rumour of the friend, who had been so much to us and who could never be out of mind. London and life are full of these spiritual miseries. In the case of relations, of shallow persons who have suddenly risen in the world, and of those far-wandering Englishmen, who write the poetry of "Home" when thousands of miles away and forget to call on their oldest friends when they are here, we take this kind of thing for granted. But Ernest Dowson was different !

One grey morning in February, 1900, I was writhing in bed in the pangs of herpes zoster, vulgarly known as shingles. Courteous reader, avoid making a rash acquaintance with that belt of fire ! My wife came into the room, and in a very startled and shocked voice announced our

friend's death. It was in the morning paper under a sensational heading. Mr Sherard had written his remarkable and much-quoted account of the poet's last hours. We found ourselves included in the general condemnation of the friends who had let him die. Ye gods ! our doors had stood open for him, our lamp had been trimmed for him for years ! He had stayed many days with us in the dear old seasons : why had he not died with us ?

They buried him according to the rites of his Church, that knew not whom she was burying. I was too ill to attend the funeral, and my wife in tears went for me, accompanied by another old defender, Mr Edgar Jepson. I could do no more than send him a laurel wreath, my custom when poets die.

In the summer the shock had been so far recovered from that one was able to think of him again as though the mysteries and the silences had not been. In Cornwall, by the violet sea, the long elegy was written which, after the lapse of many years, has been in part published in *Poetry and Drama* for June, 1913.¹ And now its kind readers ask me : " Who was the young Poet ? "

O my friend, if only ours had been another kind of good-bye !

¹ " An Informal Epitaph on a Young Poet," *Poetry and Drama*, June, 1913:

February 21, 1914.

“I have got my leave. Bid me farewell, my brothers ! I bow to you all and take my departure. Here I give back the keys of my door—and I give up all claims to my house. I only ask for last kind words from you. We were neighbours for long, but I received more than I could give. Now the day has dawned and the lamp that lit my dark corner is out. A summons has come and I am ready for my journey.”

From “Gitanjali,” by RABINDRANATH TAGORE
(Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1913).

WE are indebted to Mr GUY HARRISON for the
bibliography of ERNEST DOWSON's works.

A BIBLIOGRAPHY¹ OF THE WORKS OF ERNEST DOWSON

POETRY

1889

TEMPLE BAR. (With which is incorporated *Bentley's Miscellany*.) A Magazine for Town and Country Readers. 8vo. Vol. lxxxv. Richard Bentley & Son. London, 1889.

[Part 341 of the above, for April, 1889, contains at p. 514 a poem intituled "My Lady April," and signed "Ernest Dowson."]

1891

THE CENTURY GUILD HOBBY HORSE. Illustrated. (Edited—vols. i. and ii. by A. H. MACKMURDO and H. P. HORNE; vols. iii.-vi. by H. P. HORNE, and vol. vii. by A. H. MACKMURDO.) 7 vols. 4to. London, 1886-1892.

[Vol. vi. (1891) of the above contains the following poems, signed "Ernest Dowson":—

"Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae"
(p. 67).

¹ Only the date of *first* publication is given.

"In praise of solitude : Fleur de la lune" (p. 136).

"The Carmelite Nuns of the Perpetual Adoration"
(pp. 136-137).

"Amor Umbratilis" (pp. 137-138).]

1892

THE BOOK OF THE RHYMERS' CLUB. (Only
350 copies issued.) Roy. 16mo, pp. xvi + 94.
Elkin Mathews. London, 1892.

[The above includes the following poems by Ernest
Dowson :—

"Carmelite Nuns of the Perpetual Adoration" (pp.
10, 11).

"O Mors ! quam amara est memoria tua homini pacem
habenti in substantiis suis" (pp. 30, 31).

"Amor Umbratilis" (p. 41).

"Ad Domnulam suam" (p. 53).

"Vanitas" (pp. 69, 70).

"Villanelle of Sunset" (p. 83).]

1894

THE SECOND BOOK OF THE RHYMERS' CLUB.
(Only 500 copies issued.) Roy. 16mo, pp.
xvi + 136. Elkin Mathews and John Lane.
London, 1894.

[The above includes the following poems by Ernest
Dowson :—

"Extreme Unction" (pp. 6, 7).

"To One in Bedlam" (p. 35).

"Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae"
(pp. 60, 61).

"Growth" (p. 83).

"The Garden of Shadow" (p. 105).

“You would have understood me, had you waited”
(pp. 120, 121).

The Rhymers' Club consisted of the following :—

John Davidson ¹	.	.	.	(1857-1909)
Ernest Dowson	.	.	.	(1867-1900)
Edwin J. Ellis	.	.	.	(18 -)
George Arthur Greene	.	.	.	(1853-)
Lionel Johnson	.	.	.	(1867-1902)
Arthur Cecil Hillier	.	.	.	(18 -)
Richard Le Gallienne	.	.	.	(1866-)
Victor Plarr	.	.	.	(1863-)
Ernest Radford	.	.	.	(1857-)
Ernest Rhys	.	.	.	(1859-)
Thomas Wm. Rolleston	.	.	.	(1857-)
Arthur Symons	.	.	.	(1865-)
John Todhunter	.	.	.	(1839-)
Wm. Butler Yeats	.	.	.	(1865-).

¹ John Davidson, though a member of the club, did not contribute to the books. Besides members, the club had at one time affiliated to itself the following permanent guests:—John Gray, Edward Rose, J. T. Nettleship, Morley Roberts, A. B. Chamberlain, Edward Garnett and William Theodore Peters. These names are from a list in the handwriting of Dr G. A. Greene, who acted as hon. secretary to a club without rules or officers.]

1896

VERSES. Printed on Japanese vellum, and bound in parchment, with cover design in gold by AUBREY BEARDSLEY. (Only 30 copies so printed—also an ordinary edition of 500 copies.) Cr. 8vo, pp. xii + 57. L. Smithers. London, 1896.

THE SAVOY. An Illustrated Quarterly, devoted to literature and art, edited by ARTHUR SYMONS. 4to. Eight numbers. Jan.-Dec. 1896 (all published). Leonard Smithers. London, 1896.

[The above contains the following poems by Ernest Dowson :—

“Impenitentia Ultima.” No. 1 (Jan. 1896), p. 131.

“Saint-Germain-en-Laye.” No. 2 (Apr. 1896), p. 55.

“Breton Afternoon.” No. 3 (July 1896), p. 40.

“Venite Descendamus.” No. 4 (Aug. 1896), p. 41.

A Song, “All that a man may pray.” No. 5 (Sept. 1896), p. 36.

“The Three Witches.” No. 6 (Oct. 1896), p. 75.

“Epilogue.” No. 7 (Nov. 1896), p. 87.]

1897

THE PAGEANT. Edited by C. HAZELWOOD SHANNON and J. W. GLEESON WHITE. 4to. Henry & Co. London, 1897.

[Contains at page 232 a poem written by Dowson at Pont-Aven, Finistère, in 1896, intituled: “On a Breton Cemetery.”]

1899

DECORATIONS. In Verse and Prose. (Printed on hand-made paper, and bound in parchment, with cover design in gold by AUBREY BEARDSLEY. (Limited issue.) Sq. cr. 8vo, pp. 50. L. Smithers & Co. London, 1899.

THE POEMS OF ERNEST DOWSON. With a Memoir by ARTHUR SYMONS. Four illustrations by AUBREY BEARDSLEY, and a portrait by WILLIAM ROTHENSTEIN. Cr. 8vo, pp. xxxviii+166. John Lane. London, 1905.

[The above collected edition contains "Verses," "The Pierrot of the Minute" and "Decorations."]

PROSE

1888

TEMPLE BAR. (With which is incorporated *Bentley's Miscellany*.) A Magazine for Town and Country Readers. 8vo. Vol. lxxxii. Richard Bentley & Son. London, 1888.

[Part 326 of the above, for January 1888, contains, at pp. 83-98, "Souvenirs of an Egoist," signed "Ernest C. Dowson." This was reprinted in "Dilemmas" in 1895.]

1889

THE CRITIC.

London, 1889-18 .

[The above for 21st September 1889 contains the following by Dowson (unsigned):—

"Between the Acts." (*The Critic* Feuilleton—No. 2.)

The Critic for , 18 , contains:—

"The Cult of the Child."

1890

MACMILLAN'S MAGAZINE. 8vo. Vols. lxi. & lxiv. Macmillan & Co. London, 1890-1891.

[The above for February 1890 contains at pp. 274-281 :

"The Diary of a Successful Man"—signed "N.B."
(=Dowson). This was reprinted in "Dilemmas"
(1895).

1891

The part for August 1891 contains at pp. 305-314 :

"The Story of a Violin"—signed "Ernest Dowson."
This was later reprinted in "Dilemmas" under the
title of "An Orchestral Violin."]

THE CENTURY GUILD HOBBY HORSE. (Illustrated. (Edited—vols. i. and ii. by A. H. MACKMURDO and H. P. HORNE; vols. iii. to vi. by H. P. HORNE, and vol. vii. by A. H. MACKMURDO.) 7 vols. 4to. London, 1886-1892.

[Vol. vi. (1891) of the above contains the following, signed "Ernest Dowson":—

"A Case of Conscience" (at pp. 2-13).]

1893

THE HOBBY HORSE. (Illustrated. A continuation of *The Century Guild Hobby Horse*, edited by H. P. HORNE.) 4to. Three numbers (all published). Elkin Mathews. 1893-1894.

[No. 1 (1893) of the above contains:—

"The Statute of Limitations" (at pp. 2-8.) Reprinted in "Dilemmas" in 1895.]

DOWSON (Ernest) and ARTHUR MOORE. "A Comedy of Masks." A Novel. 3 vols. Crown 8vo. Wm. Heineman. London, 1893-4.

1894

COUPERUS (Louis Marie Anne). "Majesty."
Translated by A. TEIXEIRA DE MATTOS
and ERNEST DOWSON. 8vo, pp. 419.
T. Fisher Unwin. London, 1894.

ZOLA (Emile Edouard Charles Antoine). "La
Terre." Translated by ERNEST DOWSON.
Printed by the Lutetian Society, for private
distribution. 8vo. London, 1894.

THE YELLOW BOOK. An Illustrated Quarterly.
Edited by HENRY HARLAND [1861-1905]
and AUBREY BEARDSLEY [1862-1898]. 4to.
13 vols. April-July 1894 Elkin Mathews
and John Lane; October 1894 to April 1897
John Lane.

[Vol. iii. (Oct. 1894) contains at pp. 93-109, a story by
Dowson, intituled, "Apple Blossom in Brittany."]

1895

DILEMMAS: Stories and Studies in Sentiment.
A Case of Conscience. The Diary of a
Successful Man. An Orchestral Violin.
The Statute of Limitations. Souvenirs of an
Egoist. Crown 8vo, pp. 139. Elkin Mathews.
London, 1895.

1895-1896

MUTHER (Richard). "The History of Modern
Painting." Translated by ERNEST DOWSON,
G. A. Greene and A. C. Hillier. With over

1300 portraits and illustrations. Sq. imp.
8vo, 3 vols., pp. 2304. Henry & Co. London.
I. and II. 1895 ; III. 1896.

1896

THE SAVOY. An Illustrated Quarterly, devoted
to literature and art, edited by ARTHUR
SYMONS. 4to. Eight numbers. Smithers.
London, 1896.

[The above contains the following prose by Dowson :—

“The Eyes of Pride.” A Story. No. 1 (Jan. 1896), pp.
51-63.

“Countess Marie of the Angels.” A Story. No. 2
(April 1896), pp. 173-183.

“The Dying of Francis Donne.” A Study. No. 4
(Aug. 1896), pp. 66-74.]

BALZAC (Honoré de). “La Fille aux Yeux d’Or”
(The Girl with the Golden Eyes). Translated
by ERNEST DOWSON. With 6 Illustrations
engraved on wood by CHARLES CONDER.
Demy 8vo, pp. vii. + 107. Leonard Smithers.
London, 1896.

[Charles Conder (1868-1909) was a friend of Dowson.
There is an account of him in *The Dict. of Nat. Biog.*]

1898

CHODERLOS DE LACLOS (Pierre Ambroise
François). “Les Liaisons Dangereuses : or
Letters collected in a Private Society, and
published for the Instruction of Others.”

Translated by ERNEST DOWSON. With 15 Illustrations after Monet, Fragonard fils, and Gérard. Privately printed and limited to 350 copies. Demy 8vo. 1898.

1899

DOWSON (Ernest) and ARTHUR MOORE. "Adrian Rome." A Tale. 8vo, pp. 364. Methuen & Co. London, 1899.

DUBOIS (Guillaume, Cardinal Archbishop of Cambrai). "Memoirs of Cardinal Dubois" [by Paul Lacroix]. Translated from the French by ERNEST DOWSON. Demy 8vo. 2 vols., each with frontispiece. L. Smithers & Co. London, 1899.

VOLTAIRE (François Marie Arouet de). "La Pucelle d'Orléans" (The Maid of Orleans). An herico-comical poem, in twenty-one cantos. A new and complete translation, corrected and augmented from the earlier translation of W. H. IRELAND, and the one attributed to Lady Charleville, with the variants, now for the first time translated, by ERNEST DOWSON, for the Lutetian Society. Edition limited to 500 copies. 8vo. 2 vols. London, 1899.

DRAMA

1897

THE PIERROT OF THE MINUTE. A Dramatic Phantasy, in One Act [in verse]. With frontispiece, initial letter, vignette, cul-de-lampe and cover design by AUBREY BEARDSLEY. Edition de luxe of 300 copies. 4to, pp. 43. L. Smithers. London, 1897.

POSTHUMOUS WORKS

1907

GONCOURT (Edmond Louis Antoine de) and GONCOURT (Jules Alfred de). "The Confidantes of a King: the Mistress of Louis XV." Translated by ERNEST DOWSON. With portraits. 8vo. 2 vols. T. N. Foulis. London and Edinburgh, 1907.

1908

———"The Story of Beauty and the Beast." The complete fairy story, translated from the French by ERNEST DOWSON. With 4 plates (in colour) by CHARLES CONDER. Cr. 4to, pp. 118. John Lane. London, 1908.

REFERENCES

REFERENCES to the life, work and friends of Dowson are to be found in the following :—

THE ACADEMY (London) for November 1907 contains an appreciation of Ernest Dowson's personality under the heading: "The Real Ernest Dowson," by his friend, EDGAR JEPSON.

THE AUTHOR [founded and for many years edited by Sir WALTER BESANT] for May 1900 contains at pp. 265-268 an account of Dowson's last hours by his friend, ROBERT H. SHERARD. London.

GIBSON (Frank). "Charles Conder: His Life and Work." With a catalogue of the lithographs and etchings by CAMPBELL DODGSON. With 121 Illustrations. 4to, pp. 117. John Lane. London, 1914.

[The above contains references to Dowson's "The Story of Beauty and the Beast," at pp. 40, 68, 109; and to his translation of "La Fille aux Yeux d'Or," at pp. 78 and 109.]

✓ JACKSON (Holbrook). "The Eighteen Nineties." A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century. With 24 Illustrations. 8vo, pp. 368. Grant Richards. London, 1914.

[References to Dowson at pp. 39, 55, 69, 84, 110, 191, 194, and 201.]

KENNEDY (J. M). "English Literature: 1880-1905." 8vo, pp. 340. Stephen Swift. London, 1912.

[References to Dowson at pp. 136, 137, 138, 139 and 140.]

MURDOCH (W. G. Blaikie). "The Renaissance of the Nineties." Sq. 16mo, pp. xiii + 83. Alex. Moring. London, 1911.

[Contains some references to Dowson, and gives a critical account of the literature and art of his time.]

SHERARD (Robert Harborough). "Twenty Years in Paris." Being some Recollections of a Literary Life. With 8 Illustrations. 8vo, pp. xv. + 499. Hutchinson. London, 1905.

[Gives some personal reminiscences of Dowson at pp. 397-412 and p. 437.]

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